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Malcolm Lowry

PRESENT ESTATE OF POMPEII

In thunder, at noon, in a leaden twilight, just outside the Pompeii station, a man said to them:

"Come to my Restaurant Vesuvius. The other restaurant is broken. . . in the bombardment," he added.

Inside the restaurant during the thunderstorm, there was one moment of pure happiness within the dark inner room when it started to rain. "Now thank God I don't have to see the ruins," Roderick thought. And he watched, through the window, the dove in its little rainbeaten house, with just its feet peeping out, and then, the next moment, not a finger's breadth away, the same dove on the window sill.

This happiness was spoilt for him by the proprietor's continued insistence on what he was going to eat—when he was perfectly content, after an antipasto, with bread and wine: moreover now the rain had stopped he knew he damned well had to see the ruins.

Still he could have sat with his wife forever in that dark deserted inner room of the Restaurant Vesuvius.

Yes, it was wonderful in the restaurant here at Pompeii, with the train whistling by on one side, and the thunder crashing around Vesuvius on the other: with the rain—liquid syllables of its epilogue—the pigeon, the girl standing under the garden trellis singing, and washing dishes in the rainwater, and Tansy happy, if impatient, he wanted never to go out, to leave this scene. But when the full bottle of vino rosso was depleted by as much as one glass his spirits correspondingly sank, and almost for a moment he did not care whether he stayed or left. He cared all right though: he wanted to stay.

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If only that rich flagon of hope would stay too, undiminished with them! Or if one could only go on looking at it as if it were some symbolic vessel of an unevictable happiness!

Roderick McGregor Fairhaven sat listening to his wife describe the scenes from the train yesterday (not this train, which was the Circumvesuviana, but the Rapido, the Rome-Naples Express), how fast it went, past the magnificent Claudian aqueducts, a station, Torricola—och aye, it was a rapido indeed, he thought, as once more in memory, bang: and they flashed through Divino Amore. (No stop for Divine Love.) And the white oxen and high tension lines, the lupin and hayricks, the bellflowers and yellow mullein, the haystacks like leaning towers of Pisa, a lone hawk fluttering along the telegraph wires, the rich black soil—Tansy had seen and recorded everything, down to the wildflowers whose name she didn't know: "Lilac and gold, like a Persian carpet." The precipitous, hilly country, and now on the narrow coastal plain, the feeling of the shape of Italy: "like a razor-backed hog." Suddenly rain, and the castellated cities on the hilltops, a few dark tunnels, and beyond in the fields, in brilliant sunshine again, the men winnowing, the black chaff blowing from the wheat. And there had been nothing so beautiful, Tansy was saying, as the vermillion poppies blowing among the delicate tufted ivory-colored wheat. And then Formia, a dull station stop, but with a Naples-like town way off in the distance. They'd looked out of the window at more castellated towns built on gray rock, a blaze of poppies by a ruined wall, a flock of white geese waddling towards a pond where dark grey cows lay submerged like hippopotami. And, "You should have seen them, I thought they *were* hippopotami," Tansy said, though now there were a flock of goats, rust-red, black and cream-colored, being herded up a steep hill by a skinny little boy with bare feet and bare chest and bright blue trousers. And the signs: *Vini Preciati—Ristoro —Celezioni Calde*. . . . What did one want to look at ruins for? Why shouldn't one prefer the Restaurant Vesuvius to Pompeii, to Vesuvius itself for that matter? Roderick was now, in so far as he was listening, but delighted to hear her talk, vicariously enjoying the train trip in a way he hadn't at all in the howling electric train itself. Another brief stop: Villa Literno. And the sign: *E Prohibito Attravesare I Binari.* These were the kind of things he'd planned

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to jot down for his students—but it was Tansy who turned out to be memorizing them. And as they approached Naples he thought, there is an anonymity in movement. But when the train stops, voices are louder, more searching it seems, it is time to take stock. To him of whom stock is being taken these are bad moments. . . . And there was an anonymity too in sitting still, in the dark restaurant at Pompeii listening to one's wife talk so entrancingly. And he didn't want her to stop. Naples had been ruin enough in this year of 1948, and sad enough to have driven Boccaccio himself—Giovenne della Tranquillitate indeed—right back to Florence without even having paid a visit to Virgil's tomb—

"Pompeii," Tansy was reading aloud from her guide book—as now thank God it started to rain again—"an old Oscan town dating from the 6th century B.C., which had adopted the Greek culture, lay in the rich and fertile campania felix close to the sea, possessing moreover a busy harbor. . . ."

"I know. . . it exported fish sauce and millstones. . . .But I was thinking," Roderick brought out his pipe, "that I've read little about the malaise of travellers, even the sense of tragedy that must come over them sometimes at their lack of relation to their environment."

"———what?"

"The traveller has worked long hours and exchanged good money for this. And what is this? This, preeminently, is where you don't belong. Is it some great ruin that brings upon you this migraine of alienation—and almost inescapably these days there seems a ruin of some kind involved—but it is also something that slips through the hands of your mind, as it were, and that, seen without seeing, you can make nothing of: and behind you, thousands of miles away, it is as if you could hear your own real life plunging to its doom."

"Oh for God's sake Roddy—!"

Roderick leaned over and replenished their wine glasses, at the same time catching sight of his reflection in a flawed mirror in which also appeared the rainbarrel and the rain-dripping trellis in the garden and the dove and the girl washing dishes, where behind the word *Cinzano* and to one side of a card stuck in the frame which stated enigmatically *26-27 Lulio Pellegrinaggio a Taranto* (in Autopulman) he saw himself: beaming, merry, spectacled, stocky, strong, reflective, and grave, forceful yet shy, brave and timid at once, and

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above all patient, impatient only with impatience and intolerance, the liberal-minded and progressive Scotch-Canadian schoolmaster: he absolutely refused to credit himself the gloomy train of thought that had just been his, and indeed his mien contradicted it.

". . . the eruption began on August 24 in the early afternoon with the emission of vast quantities of vapor, mostly steam, which rushed high into the air in a vertical shaft and terminated in a canopy of cloud. . . ."

Watching his wife, admiring her, touched by her enthusiasm, a great feeling of tenderness for her overcame him. And then it seemed to him for a moment that this was not unlike tenderness for himself. In fact, half watching himself watch his wife in the mirror he could almost imagine he saw the brightness and generosity of his soul flashing off his glasses.

"Roddy, it does look a bit brighter, doesn't it? Well, if it doesn't stop we'll just go in the rain!"

And now, as the time drew closer to leave it, the Restaurant Vesuvius was already beginning to be invested with a certain nostalgia. And after another glass of wine he took delight in reflecting how something in the very depths of his wife's being seemed to respond to a moving fluctuant exciting scene: Tansy, pretty, a bit wild, delightful, enthusiastic, was a born traveller, and he often wondered if her true environment was not simply this moving ever changing background— he reached in his pocket for some matches and a news clipping fluttered out.

"Is that Dad's latest news report flying away?" Tansy said.

Roderick's father-in-law, who was a boat builder in British Columbia, near Vancouver, scarcely ever wrote his daughter at all and his correspondence with Roderick consisted of clippings from newspapers. Sometimes bits would be marked, sometimes not; very occasionally there would be half a page with some comment, in red carpenter's pencil. The enclosure Roderick had received at the American Express in Naples this morning was rather more fulsome, and consisted of half a page, mostly given over to advertisements for consolidated brokers, limited petroleum companies and drilling companies, and crowned by the gigantic headline: OIL! OIL! OIL! Subsidiary headlines appeared: BRITISH COLUMBIA RIDING HUGE INDUSTRIAL BOOM, OIL GAS ALUMINIUM SPEAR

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HEADING COLOSSAL INDUSTRIAL SURGE $BILLION PROGRAM.

At first Roderick thought this was an ironic reference to their own small speculation, which had so astonishingly paid off. Then he saw the item the old man had marked: a small "filler" which apparently had nothing to do with British Columbia at all and ran:

SCARED TO DEATH

In Arizona, a 1000 acre forest of junipers suddenly withered and died. Foresters are unable to explain it, but the Indians say the trees died of fear but they are not in agreement as to what caused the fright.

Eridanus. Now, in July, the forest behind the pretty shacks built on stilts grouped round the bay with his father-in-law's boat-building shed in the middle, would be in full bright leaf, celestially green and sunfilled, the winding path leading you through scent of mushrooms and ferns and dark firs to airy spaces where golden light sifted down through vine-leaved maples and young swaying hazel trees. Tansy's rocky ten-foot garden would be blooming with foxgloves and wild geranium, marigolds and nasturtiums and sweet alyssum, fireweed and hawksbeard would have sprung up on the bank, the sea (between visits of oiltankers to the refinery over the bay) cold, salt and pure, would be glittering in the sun and wind below the porch, and beyond, the mountains, still with high patches of snow, would rise to heaven in a turquoise haze. The wild cherry and dogwood blossoms would be gone now, the huckleberries and the blueberries would be ripe. Every day the mink would emerge from the hollow tree where he lived with his family and prance and dart secretively along the beach, or swim, only a tiny vicious sleek brown head, importantly by. The fishermen would all have sailed north to Active Pass or Prince Rupert, and save at weekends there'd be nobody there at all save the Wildernesses and perhaps the Llelewyns and his father-in-law. And that was where he should be now—not in Paris or Naples or Rome, in Eridanus, reading, correcting papers and taking notes in the long summer twilight, chatting with Tansy's father or drifting down the inlet in their rowboat, or taking Tansy and Peggy on a picnic—watching the constellations; *mens sano in corpore sano*. Sailing boats would sweep downstream or tack across the bay, and at night the lights of the

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little ferry boat would move silently down the swift dark stream among the reflections of the stars. And at night, when Peggy was asleep, he and Tansy would argue, have a moonlight swim, talk some more over a pot of tea about Time, Life, Thomas Mann, Communism, the Partisan Review, the sthenic confusion of technological advance, the responsibilities of education, Peggy's future, Gurko's *Angry Decade*———

"In 79 A.D. the catastrophe occurred. For 36 hours Vesuvius poured down upon the town a rain of pumice stone followed by a rain of ashes and boiling water which mixture formed into a mass that covered the earth with a layer several yards thick. The survivors returned after days of terror."

Suddenly Roderick remembered an evening last summer, remembered it with such intensity and longing he stared about him a moment as if seeking some escape from the Restaurant Vesuvius. A baby seal had come swimming up on the beach a few afternoons before; he and Sigbjorn Wilderness had picked it up, fearing it might be threatened or starve without its mother, and they'd kept it for several days in their bathtub. This particular day they'd taken the seal for a swim and suddenly, in a flash, it slipped away and was gone. They'd swum after it hopelessly, they'd walked along the beach, searching, and his father-in-law, who rightly considered the whole procedure puerile in the extreme, had annoyed him slightly by choosing this moment to mumble to them at length a story about a mermaid he claimed to remember some fishermen having once picked up at Port Roderick in the Isle of Man and also put in a bathtub. (According to him they had boiled some eggs for the poor monster, but while they were doing this the mermaid escaped and he recalled distinctly that when they returned from searching for it along the beach, all the water had boiled out of the saucepan.) Because a killer whale—and not merely a killer whale but a white killer whale, an albino, the first seen in nineteen years—had been sighted from the control tower of the Second Narrows Bridge swimming their way into the inlet (one of a school, but it was the Melvillian qualification that had supplied the menace), they were anxious about the seal, cursed themselves for picking it up at all, questioning too the humane paradox of the whole thing since the seal was the greatest enemy of their friends the fishermen, and Roderick and

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Tansy had ended up sitting on the Wildernesses' porch and talking. . . . Some time later on—it must have been nearly midnight for it was dark—Fairhaven had gone back to his shack to get an ill-translated collection of ancient belles-lettres published in the nineties, and a damned stupid book too—Lamartine, Volney, god knows who—he for some reason wanted to read from in answer to something Wilderness had said. And it was this walk through the woods and back that he particularly remembered now: the stillness in the forest, the absolute peace, the stars sparkling and blazing through the trees (high on a cedar his flashlight gleamed on the four watching shining timorous curious eyes of two racoons), the stillness, the peace, but also the sense of hurt, the anxiety because of the renewed talk that evening of the possibility of the railroad coming through, or that the forest would be slaughtered to make way for auto camps or a subsection, so that their troubles had seemed all at once, or once again, like those of country folk in a novel by George Eliot, or Finnish pioneers in the sixties (or, as Virginia Wilderness had remarked bitterly, Canadians or human beings of almost any period): and the sense too of something else topsy-turvily all the wrong way; Roderick stood quietly on his porch a moment, listening to the conversation of the tide coming in, bringing with it distantly, shadowily, more luminously, an oil-tanker with it. To him, standing on his porch, holding his book and flashlight, it was as if Eridanus had suddenly become, like ancient Rome, a theatre of prodigies, real and imaginary. As though the white whale hadn't been enough, the 4 o'clock news report from Vancouver heard over the Wildernesses' radio had related this in renewed reports from "several accredited sources" of the famous "flying saucers" of that period which had been witnessed that very afternoon from several different points travelling over Eridanus itself, and a sworn statement by the Chief of Police "now released for the first time to the public, that he had, while fishing with his son beyond Eridanus Port the previous Sunday, seen, cavorting there, a sea serpent." Good God! This was all hilariously, horribly funny, and Roderick could laugh again thinking about it now. But the truth was he wasn't really amused: these things taken together with his other deeper anxieties, agitated him with that kind of dark conviction of the monstrous and threatening in everything sometimes begotten by a hangover. And unable to fit these matters comfortably

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into the filing cabinet of a civilized mind it was as if willy-nilly he'd begun to think with the archaic mind of his remote ancestors instead, and the result was alarming to a degree. More alarming still was that with his civilized mind he had calmly taken what might prove a threat to the whole world with far less seriousness than he took a rumored threat to his home. Roderick saw that the tanker had stolen silently right past the refinery without his noticing it:

Frère Jacques!
Frère Jacques!
Dormez-vous?
Dormez-vous?

went the engines, if you listened carefully. . . .

And now, with an appalling chain-rattling, smiting and dither of bells, hubbub of winches, submarine churning of propellers, and orders sounding as if they were spoken half a cable's length away, though she was two miles distant, and besides by now nearly invisible, all these noises travelling over the water with the speed of a sling-shot, she dropped anchor: a few final orders floated across the inlet, then silence. Roderick stood gazing at the oil refinery, "all lit up," as Wilderness had put it, "like a battleship on the Admiral's birthday. . . ." But if the oiltanker had seemed, for an inexplicable moment, to threaten the refinery, the refinery, with its hard brilliant impersonal electric glitter, seemed at this instant suddenly to threaten him. In a day of prodigies, the refinery, though as anything but an absurd one, now also took its place in the series. As if he had never seen the place before at night, or as if it had just materialized, electrified with impersonal foreboding, it seemed now a sinister omen.

The light was on in his father-in-law's house next door, and he could see the old boat builder through the window, sitting in the warm soft golden light of his oil lamp that cast gentle shadows over the hammers and frows and adzes, the tools all sharp and oiled and lovingly cared for, smoking his pipe, but with his three other pipes ready filled for the morning beside him on the table, sitting under the oil lamp with his spectacles on, reading the *History of the Isle of Man*—

"The ruins are open to visitors daily, free of charge, from 9 to 7 o'clock. At the entrance, and even at the station, Italian, French, German and English speaking guides (tariff!) press their services on the tourists."

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"*God* damn it, yes, what?" Fairhaven sighed, smiling at Tansy.

"The time required for a conducted round is from one and a half to two hours, but to view the place properly, four or five hours are necessary. Visitors are not allowed to take food in with them. Do you know, when I was a very little girl, my mother had a stereopticon," Tansy said, "with pictures of Pompeii. Really it was my grandmother's."

"Hoot toot!"

"Oh, I wonder if it'll look like those pictures! I remember them perfectly . . . You haven't heard a word I said."

"Och yes . . . they're going to rain ashes and boiling water on us, and we can't take any food in," Roderick said. "But what about wine?"

—"All kind of different bird here," said the guide, "snail, rabbit, ibis, butterfly, zoology, botanic, snail, rabbit, lizard, eagle, snake, mouse."

There was no one else in the city of Pompeii (which at first sight had looked to him a bit like the ruins of Liverpool on a Sunday afternoon: or supposing it to have suffered another, latter-day catastrophe since the Great Fire of 1886, Vancouver itself—a few stock exchange pillars, factory chimneys, the remnants of the Bank of Montreal) just the guide; and Roderick, while returning Tansy's glance of mocking wide-eyed pleasure at this mysterious statement, knew he'd done his best to avoid him.

It was not precisely because he, Roderick, was mean, Roderick felt, nor was it precisely because there happened to be few things more natively loathsome to him than the whole business of bargaining and tipping, no, he'd avoided the guide out of a kind of ridiculous fear. For he'd so signally failed to make himself understood on this trip, often, as just now at the Restaurant Vesuvius, in the most elementary commerce, that the failure was beginning to strike at his *amour propre*. And so, rather than spoil matters at the outset by making a fool of himself, he liked rather to wander, to drift alone with Tansy, letting this sense of the strange and utter meaninglessness, to him, of his surroundings, be absorbed in that of their happiness just of being together, which certainly was real, in *her* happiness at being in Europe—just as he would have liked to have let it be absorbed wandering with her now around Pompeii. Moreover at such times he had some opportunity for imagining that he (as he damned

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well should be, as he really wanted to be) was the *cicerone*: Tansy was too intelligent to be deceived, but she was also too kind to appear undeceived; but in any case the ruse would actually work, and romance be begotten or preserved in the shape of a sort of mutual astral body of inattention outside which Tansy's own intelligence and delighted personal response no doubt operated independently, yet out of which, as if it were a god-like cloud, Roderick could imagine his most banal utterance sounding useful and informative, such as just now, he had planned to say something like, "Temple of Vespasian," or "Doric and Corinthian," or even "Bulwer-Lytton."

But the guide had been waiting for them, sitting between two ruinations, and in the twinkling of an eye they were in his clutches. And as a matter of fact he half remembered Tansy saying that you couldn't escape those clutches, you were legally bound to take a guide. He'd left the bargaining this time entirely up to Tansy, even though carried on in English. But Tansy was fortunately too caught up in her delight at the immediate situation to perceive Roderick's shame which had not, however, inspired in him any antipathy to the guide himself, who vaguely reminded Roderick of his eldest brother. He was a swarthy, swift-moving, eagle-nosed fellow, of medium height, with a flashing eye, threadbare clothes, and a military walk.

"Pompeii was a school of immorality. No hypocrite life like ours," he was announcing thoughtfully as he marched along a little ahead of them, "Blue mountains, blue sky, blue sea, and a white marble city."

The Fairhavens smiled. The mountains and sky were indeed blue, now the thunderstorm had rolled away, and could one have seen it from this point, no doubt the Bay of Naples would have appeared blue too. But, there was something extraordinarily eerie about the way the guide had said this to them, Roderick thought, as they followed him through the truncated and darkened stumps of the innundated and exhumed city, adding, proudly smiling to Tansy, "Si, I am Pompeiian!" as though to him this old Cuernavaca-cum-Acapulco of the Romans, and manufacturer of fish sauce and millstones, were not a heap of ruins but were still here, gleaming, alive, peopled and thriving, and with the sea, now withdrawn miles away, at their very doorstep; "After Pompeii was destroyed," he went on rapidly,

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but still thoughtfully, glancing up a moment at Vesuvius, "Christians make-a the strong propaganda. They say their God have destroyed Pompeii for its wickedness. Now Pompeiians they say: Pompeii is immoral town? If that were-a so, Vesuvius must-a come every day to punish us."

Roderick smiled, liking the guide, and he also looked again at Vesuvius which, now clear, with its conventional plume of smoke, seemed too far away and insignificant to have done much damage anyhow. Still, out of fairness to the volcano it seemed proper to note that its physical insignificance must be largely due to the damage it had done, Roderick went on to say to Tansy.

Alas, poor old Vesuvius had really waged a war of attrition on itself in the last century. No longer did the fire-spouting mountain wax and grow taller on the sacrifice of those beneath him, all the territory it had demolished of late years had been at its own expense, every explosion and inundation it had sent forth had decreased its own stature until now, having literally blasted its own cone off, it appeared little more than a distant hill. Vesuvius was Paracutin in reverse. Though it might still, even now at this moment, be working up more fury, perhaps the god that wished to be believed in should be wary too often of speaking through fire, of giving too many direct signs of his presence.

Actually, he was frightened of Vesuvius, in so far as he could bring himself to think of it at all. All of which caused him to remember that Tansy and he had climbed it only the day before yesterday in the company—"visiting their old stamping ground," Tansy said—of some Greeks. And he certainly would not have cared to belittle it then, Roderick thought, crossing himself as they passed the Temple of Venus and went on into the Forum. The cinders got into their shoes, the guides, with their staffs, shrouded in fog and resembling black magicians, had urged them on with loud cries toward the top, where Tansy lamented it was not now possible to descend, like Lamartine, into the crater because a recent earthquake had caused great clefts in the path down into the noisome and shattered abyss. Roderick had, by placing it in the earth, lit a cigarette to bring him luck.

It was difficult to keep up with the guide who now seemed to wear a somewhat different appearance, perhaps because his complete

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air of belonging, even of ownership, had begun to invest him with a curious and different dignity: he had, or had now, the aspect to Roderick of a stout, prosperous and jovial business man, quite carefully dressed, in conservative business clothes: dark grey striped coat, light grey flannel trousers, dark grey tie, white shirt. His coat, from whose pocket papers protruded, was too tight over his stomach, his sleeves drew up on his shirt, while the trousers were frayed: this had given the effect of shabbiness. But at the same time he had this hearty soldierly quality about him, and this swift military walk of Roderick's brother, a walk which carried him, and Tansy with him, often quite far ahead of Roderick's measured pace. They crossed the forum obliquely and disappeared ahead of him amid some huge blackened pillars.

"You see, Temple of Augustus," he was saying when Roderick overtook them, "You see? Acorn and Laurel: force and power. The Romans say, 'Each moment of love lost is a moment of happiness spoiled. . . .' The Romans say, 'Life is a very long-a dream with open eyes,' " he greeted Roderick, " 'when eyes closed all-a finished, all is-a dust. . . .' Lovers just like-a beasts. . . . They spend life in honey, sweet life." "He means bees," Tansy explained to Roderick, turning to him conspiratorily. "Beasts, bees. . . . Acorn, laurel, butchers, fish beefmarket. Ventilation from sea, breeze come inside, to smell out."

"Ah yes, said Roderick . . . *"Der Triumphbogen der Nero."*

"What, darling?"

"The Arco di Nerone. Only I thought it sounded better in German."

"Si. Arco di Nerone . . . The Romans say: 'Life is a series of formalities, too seriously taken,' " the guide assured them, turning round. He possessed an admirable name: Signor Salacci.

And there was no doubt about it, Roderick thought again, this town, that both was and was not here, was obviously very real and complete to the excellent Signor Salacci: he saw it all. And moreover he was utterly adjusted to it. In a far realer sense than an actor lives in his scene Signor Salacci *lived* here, in Pompeii. Meantime these arches and temples and markets created and uncreated themselves before Roderick's eyes so that he almost began to see them with the guide's eyes. What was strange was this tragic—tragic because

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almost successful—effort at permanence. It looked sometimes as though the Romans here had made all their dreams come true in terms of convenience, wicked and good alike. Vesuvius had long since destroyed Pompeii's old inhabitants, but there seemed an immortality about the conveniences, which was a disturbing thought.

"Pompeii may have been beautifully proportioned, but it was not, so far as I know, a town singular in its era for any remarkable nobility of conception," he said. "On the other hand—"

"If you compare it with Bumble, Saskatchewan—"

"But what seems most remarkable to me is that no one has attempted to draw a moral from this relative survival of Pompeii, when so much breath has been wasted on the divine judgment of its destruction. Of the two the survival seems the more sinister. . . . Compared with St. Malo or parts of Rotterdam it's a triumph. In fact along-side of what's left of Naples it seems to me to have a positive civic grace."

The Junipers that died of fear. . . . Ruins, ruins, ruins—

—The first night they arrived in Naples they had taken a cab and driven for an hour behind the sidestepping horse along the promenade. What was left of this great city of stupendous history where Virgil had written the Aeneid and which was once the extreme point of the Greek world? No doubt much had survived. Yet to him it had appeared, where it was not simply a heap of grey rubble, like a second rate seaside resort, with ugly soulless buildings and mediocre swimming, on the northwest coast of England. Surely, he'd thought, as he held Tansy's hand in the clopping and sideslipping cab, he could invest it with more excitement than that for her.

That night they wandered through the incredible steep dark back streets of the Neapolitan slums, past the shrines, the niches, the children setting up Catherine wheels, up the long smelly wonderful stairways between houses, past the bedsteads set right on the street, the sailors lurchingly carrying the girls' bags—the Rembrandt supper at Emmaeus round every corner. From a high top window of a narrow tall building a basket was lowered, little by little, and at the bottom filled with wine, and bread and fruit, and, jerkingly, withdrawn. And that was what travel was supposed to be, thought Roderick, like that basket that is lowered down into the past, and is brought back again, safely through one's window, filled with the

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spiritual nourishment of one's voyaging. And that, he profoundly hoped, would be what it was for Tansy. . . . Here were the poor, here were the ruins, but the great difference between these man-made ruins and the ruins of Pompeii was that the ruins for the most part had not been found worth preserving or had been carried away. . . . Life itself was something like the desolation that comes to one eternally wading through the poem of The Waste Land without understanding it. Awestruck by his callousness, his ignorance, his lack of time, his fear that there will be no time to build anything beautiful, fear of eviction, of ejection, man no longer belongs to or understands the world he has created. Man had become a raven staring at a ruined heronry. Well, let him deduce his own ravenhood from it if he could.

They came to the Casa dei Vetti, or the Domus Vettorium, the most famous house in Pompeii, which partly accounted for their guide's haste; Pompeii closed at five and they had a late start.

Signor Salacci produced a key, unlocked a door, and they entered: "You want lady-wife to see pictures? Only marrieds can see," he explained. "Each house a little town: garden; theatre: vomitory, to vomit, and a love room inside."

"And to the right of the entrance is a Priapus," observed Roderick, reading from the guidebook, "only shown by request. However, Tansy," he continued, "here 'one has the best possible picture of a Pompeiian noble's house since the beautiful paintings and marble decorations have been left as they were in the Peristyle which has been furnished with plants. One portion of the house has been provided with a roof and windows so as to protect the surprisingly well preserved and most wonderfully executed murals depicting mythological scenes. There is a kitchen containing cooking utensils, and adjoining a locked private cabinet (obscene paintings) which belonged to the master of the house and here too is a statue of Priapus intended as part of the fountain. . . .' I hope," Roderick added, this is not what your mother showed you on the stereopticon."

"Basin for goldfish," the guide was saying, "Peacocks and dogs. Put phosphorus on stone. White columns and a blue sky. Difficult to believe . . . original. . . ." Signor Salacci sighed.

"You mean—?"

"Water jets and flying birds and phosphorus in the pavement,"

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sang Signor Salacci, "and the walls lacquered red and then waxed, with Afrika leopard, and an erotic frieze—"

"They had torches burning so that the inside of this room was in red light to make everyone excited," Tansy was explaining to Roderick, who'd been standing at a little distance. "But in contrast to this the garden was all in white marble, with cool fountains playing and open to the moonlight."

"Usually gave these orgy feasts to the full moon," the guide mused nostalgically.

"And during these orgy feasts?"

"Slaves had to pray for them—" they had arrived at a shrine to the household golds, the Lares and Penates (how would their old kettle be, their stove, Tansy's copper pans?) "For bachelors had," he said devoutly, "too much to do bachelor."

The guide was now opening the padlock on an oblong wooden cover, that he folded back to reveal, momentarily, an oblong framed picture, about eighteen inches long, and a foot wide, evidently of some kind of unusual Cyrano de Bergerac, painted (and from all appearances quite recently subtly improved upon in Marseilles) in black, ochre and red, of a Cyrano engaged in weighing, it seemed at first sight, upon a sort of Safeway scale, his nose, which emitted curious carmine sparkles: "Where there is money, there is art, there is taste, there is intelligence, there is perdition, there is fight—that is Pompeii!" glowed Signor Salacci, turning the key in the padlock again upon this jealously preserved and athletic relic.

"I always heard there was a reproduction of the Screw Of Archimedes in Pompeii," Roderick observed, "but I thought he worked it with his feet."

"But I don't understand about the windows, Rod," Tansy was giggling, perhaps to conceal her embarrassment, or her embarrassment at evincing before the guide that she was one in whom a natural innocence and decency was combined with a restrained yet wholeheartedly Rabelaisian appreciation.

"Well, it's just as he said, Tansy dear. There aren't any bloody windows, or rather there weren't. Just as the walls weren't marble, but covered with stucco imitation of marble facing. They're simply paintings of windows to give the impression you're looking through a real window." Roderick filled his pipe. "Of course according to

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Swedenborg the real sunrise is an imitation. . . . The technique seems vaguely literary in origin."

"You've got to admit it has certain advantages of privacy—"

"Och aye. . . In short, with certain obvious reservations it's much the same bastard-mansard ye olde Wigwamme Inne Cockington Moosejaw and Damnation-in-the-World—"

"What did you say, Rod?"

"I said, do you remember the man who wanted to pebbledash Gerald's house? Or perhaps I was thinking of those sheets of fabric on Percy's garage that are painted to look like red brick."

"First wine, every one will be drunk, and afterwards brothel," announced Signor Salacci, locking the Casa dei Vetti behind them and with the air of an indulgent host in the middle of a debauch proposing further delights.

They left the house and drifted off at a great pace through the sunshine down the Vico dei Vetti, and after casting a glance down the Strada del Vesuvio in the direction of the mountain, turned the Strada Stabiana.

"It was a silly place to put a volcano," said Roderick as now, passing the Casa di Cavio Rufo on their right, they arrived at a crossroads made by the intersection of the Strada degli Augustali with the Strada Stabina.

They turned right again into a narrow, rough, and extremely crooked and winding street that had the appearance of going on forever.

"Vico de Lapanare. Wine woman and song street," crowed the guide triumphantly. "First wine, and afterwards brothel," he repeated. "Bread and woman, the first element in life, symbolic. . . . All symbolic. . . . wait! one entrance—bachelors downstairs; married, priests and the shamefuls upstairs."

There are, unless you happened to be Toulouse-Lautrec, few things in life less profitable than going to a brothel, unless, Roderick reflected, it was going to a ruined brothel. This was a whole street of ruined brothels. The houses had been built of stone but it was necessary to use considerable imagination to people them, least of all with delights. To him they resembled at first rather a series of disjasked ovens, or, if one could imagine pigpens made of brick, pigpens, but with shelves and niches, so that they seemed to have

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been made to accommodate the consummations of some race of voluptuous dwarfs.

"Roderick, do look, honey, here are the mills where the flour was ground!—and the ovens, see, there's even a petrified loaf of bread!"

"Si, first bread, then wine, then woman on this-a street," Signor Salacci was nodding importantly, "first elements of life, all symbolic!"

Roderick was aware now of a certain blasé obtuseness. Still, a whole street of dead brothels, that had so miraculously survived—relatively—the wrath of god—that was perhaps something to stimulate the lower reaches of the mind after all! Or if not, the ruined pharmacists, which the guide was pointing out so conveniently placed on the corner, might have indeed. It was abundantly clear too, that once again, so far as Signor Salacci was concerned, these places not merely existed, but were, for him, doing a lively, if ghostly trade. Particularly their guide seemed pleased by the Cyranesque-Priapic trade emblem that, set from time to time amidst the cobbles, indicated waggishly the direction in which even now the phantom bachelors of Pompeii were perhaps proceeding to their grisly quarters downstairs where, once ensconced, past them an eternal ascending procession of marrieds, priests and shamefuls floated on their way to be vampired and counter-whored upstairs. Signor Salacci's romantic attachment touched and delighted Roderick. He was making the afternoon a success. It was not even impossible—Roderick saw him once brushing away what might have been a tear—some great grief, some romance, survived, for him, here. Nonetheless Roderick found himself suddenly hating this street with an inexplicable virulence. How he loathed Pompeii! His mouth positively watered with his hatred. Roderick was almost prancing. It seemed to him now that it was as though, by some perverse grace, out of the total inundation of some Pacific Northwestern city, had been preserved a bit of the station hotel, a section of the gasworks, the skeletal remains of four or five palatial cinemas, as many bars and several public urinals, a fragment of market place together with the building that once housed the Star Laundries, what was left of several fine industrialists' homes (obscene paintings), a football stadium, the Church of the Four Square Gospel, a broken statue of Bobbie Burns, and

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finally the remains of the brothels in Chinatown which, though the mayor and police force had labored to have them removed right up to the time of the catastrophe, had nonetheless survived five thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine generations whereupon it was concluded, probably rightly, that the city was one of the seven wonders of the world, as it now stood, but wrongly that anything worthwhile had been there in the first place, with the exceptions of the mountains. The guide had just said too that even the noise of traffic had been so deafening in Pompeii that during certain hours they'd had to put a stop to it altogether, as one could well imagine on the stone paved streets—God how one must have longed to get away! And then he remembered that Pompeii was not a city at all, it was only a small town, by the, by the—

Roderick had found his book among a collection of old *American Mercuries* that must have been there since he'd built the house and started back; but when he came out on his porch he stopped· the beauty of the scene was phenomenal, terrifying, ominous and yet oddly reassuring at once. The moon had come out and now it shone high in a sky of fleece, in which were patches of sky the color of dark blue serge, twinkling with brilliant stars. The tide was at high slack, the water so calm and still the whole heavens were reflected as in a dark mirror. Then he realized that it was not the moonlight or even the inlet that gave the scene its new, unique beauty, but precisely the oil refinery itself, or more precisely still, the industrial counterpoint, the flickering red pyre of the burning oil-waste. Now over the water (so still he could hear the Wildernesses talking softly together 200 yards away) came the slow warning bell of a goods' train chiming on the rail over Port Boden as for a continual vespers, now closer, now receding, now Byzantine in its timbre, as it vibrated in the water, now dolorous like Oaxaqueñian bells, now a blue sound, now as it approached, fuller, more globular, then fading, but always as if some country sound heard long ago that might have inspired a Wordsworth or Coleridge to describe church bells borne over the fields to some wandering lovers at evening. But whereas the moonlight washed the color out of everything replacing it by luminousness, providing illumination without color, the flaming burning vermilion oil waste below the moon to the right half way up the opposite bank made the most extraordinary lurid color, enormously

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real, as it were, bad: as the bells continued to chime intermittently along the rail, the continual vespers not receding, or drowned by an occasional mournful whistle and distant clunking of wheels on iron, Roderick thought how different Eridanus would look from the refinery side. What would they see? Nothing at all, perhaps only the oil lamp in his father-in-law's house and the illumined open windows of the Wildernesses, nothing else, probably not even the Wildernesses' pier which looked so magnificent in the moonlight, striking down into its reflection with its geometrically beautiful cross-braces, just the shadowy bulk of the forest, and the mountains rising above; they wouldn't see even the shapes of the shacks, or perhaps that there was a bay at all; the whole perhaps inseparable from its own shadow.

The Wildernesses' cat debouched itself from his father-in-law's house and followed him, bounding up the steps and along the trail, leading him back to the Wildernesses, stopping for him to catch up, then leaping on again. Once he stopped to pet the creature which suddenly seemed to him like some curious aspect or affection of eternity and for some reason, standing there in the forest, it had struck him as strange that cats must have looked and behaved exactly the same in, say, not merely Volney's but Dr. Johnson's day. Meanwhile with his flashlight he sought one of the passages from Volney's *Ruin of Empires* that he'd recalled and wanted to read: "Where are the ramparts of Nineveh, those walls of Babylon, those palaces of Persepolis, those temples of Balbec and Jerusalem—" it was absolutely the most obvious kind of dithyrambic tripe, but considering when it was written might be, so he felt at that moment anyhow, interesting in his discourse with Wilderness, to compare with Toynbee. "—the temples are fallen, the palaces overthrown, the ports filled up, the cities destroyed, and the earth, stripped of its inhabitants, has become a place of sepulchres. Great God! Whence proceed such fatal revolutions? What causes have so changed the fortunes of those countries? Wherefore are so many cities destroyed. . . where are those brilliant creations of industry. . .?"

Going through the forest that night with the bounding and whirling cat all at once it had seemed to him, as if he stood outside time altogether, that in some way the cities of Volney's had not been exactly destroyed, that the ancient populations *had* been reproduced and perpetuated, or rather that the whole damned thing was happen-

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ing now, at this moment, continually repeating itself, that continually those empires and cities were being created and destroyed and created again as it were before his eyes: then again he began to think that, far more mysterious than any of the questions Volney posed, was the fact that people still found it necessary to ask them, or answer them with unsatisfactory explanations. Had Toynbee really said anything new? Had Volney in his day? With his flashlight, while the cat impatiently sharpened his claws on a tree, he had recourse to the forgotten Volney once more. "Individuals will feel that private happiness is allied to the public good." Well, that seemed a point worth discussing at any rate: but what was the public good? What was private happiness?

"In Germany, England, red light," Signor Salacci was saying. "Roman better idea. Cock outside."

Well, St. Malo was wiped out, Naples defaced, but a cock in the street outside an antique Pompeiian brothel still survived. Well, why not?

"Aesculapius snakes outside, a doctor. . ." the guide went on. "The chemist and public bathwash. . . .soldiers, students, cheapest prices. Just before the war, in Mussolini time, they had just like this. Regular price is 15 lira. For students and soldiers half price 7:50 —but cheap is always dangerous. . . .Chemist and public bathwash," he pointed down the Vico dei Lupanare. "In Southern Italy is plenty clap. Seventy per cent of people have-a the clap but now is American penicillin—whissht, in few days!—so nobody know percentage."

Roderick purred. . . .Man, excellent in wit, had discovered how to cure clap in twenty-four hours. Without resource he meets nothing that must come! So with his resource therefore he saw, in this marvelous discovery, the possibility of catching a different kind of clap every day for the next seventy-two days, perhaps, on the seventy-third an absolutely unique kind.

"Wine street, woman street and public bathwash," the guide was intoning in sombre, almost biblical tones. . . . "In Pompeii you pay advance. Many men come. Etrangers. Strangers, and sailors, you understand. No speak-a the Latin. But Romans make it easy. In every room is painted different position and man pick-a what he want. Ah, wine woman and song street! Wait," he added, raising an ad-

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monitory finger as Roderick seemed about to say something. "All street symbolic. All anchored east and west, north and south. Except crooked street, wine street and woman street. . . A man drunk can-a say, 'I don't know where I am. I don't-a know where I was.' So streets are straight except for curved, so he can't say I don't know where I was. Si," he said, as now they walked on down the circumambient Vico dei Lumpanare toward the Strada dell'Abbondanza, "So streets are straight except for curved so he can't-a say I don't know where I was." He shook his head.

Roderick's last memory of Eridanus was of a colossal fire: the Salinas meekly unloading crude oil at the refinery, innocent rakish smokestakes aft, and then bang, and up went the wharf, sirens wailing as though it were suddenly the lunch hour; then the tanker backing out silently into the inlet, or rather pulling, breaking her mooring lines, and the flames on the tanker apparently subdued as a mushroom of smoke went up on its extending columnar stalk a thousand feet into the air from the refinery: bang, bang, as the oil drums exploded: the noise of crackling even at a distance of two miles and the huge hoses visible: bang and the freight train that rushed soundlessly through the refinery: bang, bang, watching the fire from the Wildernesses' pier, for it looked like a major and terrifying disaster to the whole waterfront, his knees trembling so hard that he couldn't hold the binoculars still: bang, and the Salinas now motionless right opposite, and the fire getting worse, the noise of crackling, roaring, and the two-toned moaning rockets of sound of sirens, whirring diminuendo, and then, after half an hour or so, the arrival of the magnificent turreted fireboat, neighing like a horse, from the town, like a urinating dinosaur, a monitor, a medieval but supermodern fantasy, a creation of Leonardo da Vinci—and the disaster averted—unless the oil on the ebbing tide should catch fire: and the trellis work of the oil company pier clearly silhouetted against the smoke and steam: the planes flying overhead trying to photograph it for the newspapers: and the Salinas that seemed to have no one aboard slowly, slowly and silently steaming guiltily down and away to Port Boden: and then the excitement over, and then all afternoon the maniacal aspect of the sky, the sun like a fiery hub to a gigantic black-disked wheel tired by a rainbow, and the stink of fried oil drifting over the water, and in the evening the curious sightseers row-

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ing over to the hissing wharf: and then to see, the next morning, though the wharf seemed half destroyed, by God, the Salinas, with a guilty expression, sneaking slowly and silently back to the refinery from Port Boden: the cottage on the opposite green bank slowly sliding aft of the bridge, aft of the mainmast, aft of the funnel, as with her fire-scarred paintwork to starboard she now silently soundlessly and slowly and wearing that guilty expression approached the refinery again, on which wreckage a single hose was still playing like a distant flickering white line, the Salinas now wearing an expression like a drunk with a hangover approaching at early morning the pub from which she has been thrown out the previous night, the necessary flag pretended to fly on the stunted foremast like a ragged tie tied with trembling hand, and the American flag at the stern as if her shirt tail were hanging out drooping aft in the windless gloomy air of seven bells in the morning, obviously half wanting to give the refinery a wide berth, but just as obviously having to pass it (and as obviously wanting to stop in) invested as it was for her with her abhorrence and like some subdued roguish Don Quixote—because of excesses there, which she did not know or could not remember but in any case would probably be blamed, tip-toeing past the refinery, but next moment—and by God she had guts, she had character to brave the irate and weary oiltender this morning—as large as life, as if propped on elbow against the ravaged and wrecked bar of the refinery, in exactly the same place as the day before . . . "As I was saying, fellow, when we were so rudely interrupted. . . ." And that evening, hours and hours later, with a shameless but unmistakably rakish raffish list to starboard toward the wharf, in exactly the same place, as if talking her head off. And then—so much for symbols and presciences of disaster!—the next morning dawning blue and clean and fresh, with white horses running past the refinery wharf, that now looked completely undamaged, and the Salinas gone, to be plunging innocently somewhere in the blue Pacific, her hangover washed away and the fire gone, and the smell and noise and sirens gone, and the fresh green of the forest, the blowing blue and white smoke of sawmills against the green hills, and the maniacal sky gone and the mountains high and the sea blue and cold and clean and an innocent sun over all. . . .

"Where there is-a too much religion, is perdition—white, red

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light and a cock outside," the guide mused, discovering another horizontal emblem in the pavement outside the ex-respectable lupanar. "Formalities!" He regarded this dislocated and unusual signpost—perhaps the great-grandfather of all signposts—a moment. "Friend ask—" he began, "But how to find this-a house? Friend say: go to fountain thirty paces on left pavement is cock pointing. Friend go . . ." he gestured significantly, as if having gone. "Why for this? He goes in. Very nice, very clean, separate rooms for love and fine garden where walk around first to get excited. . . ." Signor Salacci was tired and sat down for a moment on a ruined wall. The abomination of desolation sitting in the unholy place. "Very dirty streets," he added as now they started to move on once more. "Contrasts," he said musingly, "in everything. Roman Empire start-a in Pompeii to-a going down . . . old marbles a-broken," he said sadly. He pointed to a lone bust, sad in the brilliant sunshine. "A facsimile of Apollo—exactly the same size but—" he hissed and made a long expression, "with a lady-face, because the Greeks make everything so sweet and gentle, but the Romans make everything like this:" he drew down a growth of savage air from his chin, "with beards."

"Roman exaggerations is," he continued after a while, "each exaggeration in life is defeat, and therefore downfalls. . . . You see," he said, pointing out an example of this phenomenon, "Lime is-a stronger than stone, stones worn out, lime still good. Attention, gentlemen, the curve!" He guided their steps around a pre-Roman Doric column. "In Italian we laugh and we say, 'Attention, gentlemen, the curve.' A pun," he explained. "Curva also mean lost woman. . . ." They approached a heap of rubble. "Americans drop bombs here. . . . Americans will drop bomb anywhere," he lamented delightedly. "Students walking in garden." The Fairhavens looked round but they didn't see them. "Greek theater, soldier barrack, night theater, pine trees," he hummed: "Where is too much religion is perdition," he added, "white, red light, and a cock outside. Formalities! See, modern plumbing." And Roderick reflected, looking at the twisted pieces of big lead pipes, that once upon a time it was true, the Romans *did* have modern plumbing.

Until a man has built (or helped to build—for he had helped the Wildernesses build their house) a house with his own hands, Roderick thought, he may feel a sense of inferiority before such things

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as Greek columns. But if he happens to have helped build so much as a summer shack upon the beach he will not feel inferiority, even if he does not understand in the aggregate the entire meaning of a Doric temple. The baseless shaft, the capital, and the lower fascia, that would connect the columns, at least become clear. The shaft was analagous to the cedar piles that they had sunk into the hardpan. Capitals they had achieved without meaning to, solely because it would turn out that a pile had unintentionally been sunk too deep for the stringer and the post to be square, so between the stringer and the post they would insert a block. The wooden stringer, say a 2 or 3 inch plank, corresponded to the lower fascia, though if one had been completely successful the stringer would rest directly upon the post: thus, the capital, as something deliberate, perhaps had no function, and was the result of an original disharmony, when people built with wood; someone had decided, perhaps on some occasion when a mistake on one side had been balanced by a similar mistake on the other, that it was an aesthetic improvement. These curious thoughts occurred to Roderick as, bent over his camera, he was trying to get Tansy and the guide, who were having a conversation over by the Temple of Apollo, into focus, for the light from the slowly westering sun was good now and the ruins were full of interesting, if pretty obvious, shadows. Ridiculous and far-fetched though it might sound, what he had been thinking gave Roderick, finally, a certain kinship with the builders of Pompeii. . . . But these Pompeiians—what had they built for? What was this instinct that made man herd together like partridges, like sardines in tomato paste, this cowardly dependence on the presence of others?

Suddenly he thought he knew what was wrong. This—in Pompeii, in Naples—this had happened to him, to Roderick McGregor Fairhaven, the visitor from Ultima Thule. What it amounted to was a feeling that there was not going to be time. Did you want to harrow yourself looking at what had been only temporarily spared, at what was finally doomed? And Roderick could not help but wonder whether man too was not beginning to stand, in some profound inexplicable sense, fundamentally in some such imperfect or dislocated relation to his environment as he. Man once stood at the center of the universe, as Elizabethan poets stood at the center of the world. But the difference between the man-made ruins and the ruins of

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Pompeii was that the man-made ones had not for the most part been found worth preserving, or had been carried away. Had some precious part of man been carried away with the ruins? Partly it was as if man built with ruin in view. . . . See Naples and die!

"Thank you, Tansy dear," Roderick said, clicking the shutter. "Now may I take one of you alone, Signor?"

"Si," the guide said, evidently finishing something he'd been saying to Tansy. "Si, I am Pompeiian."

And suddenly laughing as if to please them, the guide, that perfectly adjusted man, made a Roman salute, and Roderick snapped him standing there—right arm upraised, so that it drew his coat very tight under his arms, and the papers stood out of his pocket—between the pillars of the demolished Temple of Apollo.

"We thank you very much indeed for everything, Signor," Roderick said, winding the film forward and replacing the camera in his pocket.

They were about to leave Pompeii by the Porta Marina and Signor Salacci said to them: "The gate is built like a funnel, for a ventilation, to suck up fresh air from the sea, blowing up to the mountain and ventilate town—street banked very straight to the right. So when it rains, water runs to right, you walk dry on left.

"Slaves and animals on one side," he reminded them as they shook hands at the portal. "People on the other."

They all stood looking back over the ancient town towards Vesuvius and Roderick asked:

"And when do you think there's going to be another eruption, Signor?"

"Ah . . ." Signor Salacci wagged his head sombrely. And then as he regarded the mountain a look of enormous pride came over his face. "But yesterday," he said, "yesterday she give-a the beeg-a shake!"

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Raymond Williams

REALISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

The centenary of "realism" as an English critical term occurred but was not celebrated in 1956. Its history, in this hundred years, has been so vast, so complicated and so bitter that any celebration would in fact have turned into a brawl. Yet realism is not an object, to be identified, pinned down, and appropriated. It is, rather, a way of describing certain methods and attitudes, and the descriptions, quite naturally, have varied, in the ordinary exchange and development of experience. Recently, I have been reconsidering these descriptions, as a possible way of defining and generalizing certain personal observations on the methods and substance of contemporary fiction. I now propose to set down: first, the existing variations in "realism" as a descriptive term; second, my own view of the ways in which the modern novel has developed; third, a possible new meaning of realism.

There has, from the beginning, been a simple technical use of "realism," to describe the precision and vividness of a rendering in art of some observed detail. In fact, as we shall see, this apparently simple use involves all the later complexities, but it seemed, initially, sufficiently accurate to distinguish one technique from others: realism as opposed to idealization or caricature. But, also from the beginning, this technical sense was flanked by a reference to content: certain kinds of subject were seen as realism, again by contrast with different kinds. The most ordinary definition was in terms of an ordinary, contemporary, everyday reality, as opposed to traditionally heroic, romantic or legendary subjects. In the period since the Renaissance, the advocacy and support of this "ordinary, everyday, contemporary reality" have been normally associated with the rising middle

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class, the *bourgeoisie*. Such material was called "domestic" and "bourgeois" before it was called "realistic," and the connections are clear. In literature the domestic drama and, above all, the novel, both developing in early eighteenth-century England with the rise of an independent middle class, have been the main vehicles of this new consciousness. Yet, when the "realist" description arrived, a further development was taking place, both in content and in attitudes to it. A common adjective used with "realism" was "startling," and, within the mainstream of "ordinary, contemporary, everyday reality" a particular current of attention to the unpleasant, the poor, and the sordid could be distinguished. Realism thus appeared as in part a revolt against the ordinary bourgeois view of the world; the realists were making a further selection of ordinary material which the majority of bourgeois artists preferred to ignore. Thus "realism," as a watchword, passed over to the progressive and revolutionary movements.

This history is paralleled in the development of "naturalism," which again had a simple technical sense, to describe a particular method of art, but which underwent the characteristic broadening to "ordinary, everyday reality" and then, in particular relation to Zola, became the banner of a revolutionary school — what the *Daily News* in 1881 called "that unnecessarily faithful portrayed of offensive incidents."

Thus, entwined with technical descriptions, there were in the nineteenth-century meanings doctrinal affiliations. The most positive was Strindberg's definition of naturalism as the exclusion of God: naturalism as opposed to supernaturalism, according to the philosophical precedents. Already, however, before the end of the century, and with the increasing clarity in our own, "realism" and "naturalism" were separated: naturalism in art was reserved to the simple technical reference, while realism, though retaining elements of this, was used to describe subjects and attitudes to subjects.

The main twentieth-century development has been curious. In the West, alongside the received uses, a use of "realism" in the sense of "fidelity to psychological reality" has been widely evident, the point being made that we can be convinced of the reality of an experience, of its essential realism, by many different kinds of artistic method, and with no necessary restriction of subject-matter to the ordinary, the contemporary, and the everyday.

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The major tradition of European fiction, in the nineteenth century, is commonly described as a tradition of "realism," and it is equally assumed that, in the West at any rate, this particular tradition has ended. The realistic novel, it was said recently, went out with the hansom cab. Yet it is not at all easy, at first sight, to see what in practice this means. For clearly, in the overwhelming majority of modern novels, including those novels we continue to regard as literature, the ordinary criteria of realism still hold. It is not only that there is still a concentration on contemporary themes; in many ways elements of ordinary everyday experience are more evident in the modern novel than in the nineteenth- century novel, through the disappearance of certain taboos. Certainly nobody will complain of the modern novel that it lacks those startling or offensive elements which it was one of the purposes of the term "realism" to describe. Most description is still realistic, in the sense that describing the object as it actually appears is a principle few novelists would dissent from. What we usually say is that the realistic novel has been replaced by the "psychological novel," and it is obviously true that the direct study of certain states of consciousness, certain newly apprehended psychological states, has been a primary modern feature. Yet realism as an intention, in the description of these states, has not been widely abandoned. Is it merely that "everyday, ordinary reality" is now differently conceived, and that new techniques have been developed to describe this new kind of reality, but still with wholly realistic intentions? The questions are obviously very difficult, but one way of approaching an answer to them may be to take this ordinary belief that we have abandoned (developed beyond) the realistic novel, and to set beside it my own feeling that there is a formal gap in modern fiction, which makes it incapable of expressing one kind of experience, a kind of experience which I find particularly important and for which, in my mind, the word "realism" keeps suggesting itself.

Now the novel is not so much a literary form as a whole literature in itself. Within its wide boundaries, there is room for almost every kind of contemporary writing. Great harm is done to the tradition of fiction, and to the necessary critical discussion of it, if "the novel" is equated with any one kind of prose work. It was such a wrong equation which made Tolstoy say of *War and Peace*: "it is not a novel." A form which in fact includes *Middlemarch* and

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Auto-da-Fe, Wuthering Heights and *Huckleberry Finn, The Rainbow* and *The Magic Mountain,* is indeed, as I have said, more like a whole literature. In drawing attention to what seems to me now a formal gap, I of course do not mean that this whole vast form should be directed to filling it. But because it is like a whole literature, any formal gap in the novel seems particularly important.

When I think of the realist tradition in fiction, I think of the kind of novel which creates and judges the quality of a whole way of life in terms of the qualities of persons. The balance involved in this achievement is perhaps the most important thing about it. It looks at first sight so general a thing, the sort of thing most novels do. It is what *War and Peace* does; what *Middlemarch* does; what *The Rainbow* does. Yet the distinction of this kind is that it offers a valuing of a whole way of life, a society that is larger than any of the individuals composing it, and at the same time valuing creations of human beings who, while belonging to and affected by and helping to define this way of life, are also, in their own terms, absolute ends in themselves. Neither element, neither the society nor the individual, is there as a priority. The society is not a background against which the personal relationships are studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the way of life. Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of the general life, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal terms. We attend with our whole senses to every aspect of the general life, yet the center of value is always in the individual human person — not any one isolated person, but the many persons who are the reality of the general life. Tolstoy and George Eliot, in particular, often said, in much these terms, that it was this view they were trying to realize.

Within this realist tradition, there are of course wide variations of degree of success, but such a viewpoint, a particular apprehension of a relation between individuals and society, may be seen throughout, as a mode. And when it is put to me that the realist tradition has broken down, it is this viewpoint that I see as having been lost, and it is the relative absence of this viewpoint that I see as the formal gap in the modern novel. I do not mean that this apprehension is, or should be, tied to any particular style. The kind of realistic (or as we now say, naturalistic) description that "went out with the hansom cab" is in no way essential to it; it was even, perhaps, in writers like

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Bennett, a substitute for it. Such a vision is not realized by detailed stocktaking descriptions of shops or back-parlors or station waiting-rooms. These may be used, as elements of the action, but they are not this essential realism. If they are put in, for the sake of description as such, they may in fact destroy the balance that is the essence of this method; they may, for example, transfer attention from the people to the things. It was actually this very feeling, that in this kind of fully-furnished novel everything was present but actual individual life, that led, in the 1920's, to the disrepute of "realism." The extreme reaction was in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves,* where all the furniture, and even the physical bodies, have gone out of the window, and we are left with voices and feelings, voices in the air — an equally damaging unbalance, as we can now see. It may indeed be possible to write the history of the modern novel in terms of a polarization of styles, object-realist and subject-impressionist, but the more essential polarization, which has occurred since 1900, is the division of the realist novel, which had created the substance and quality of a way of life in terms of the substance and qualities of persons, into two separate traditions, the "social" novel and the "personal" novel. In the social novel there may be accurate observation and description of the general life, the aggregation, in the personal novel there may be accurate observation and description of persons, the units. But each lacks a dimension, for the way of life is neither aggregation nor unit, but a whole indivisible process.

We now commonly make this distinction between "social" and "personal" novels; indeed in one way we take this distinction of interest for granted. By looking at some examples, the substantial issue may be made clear. There are now two main kinds of "social" novel. There is, first, the descriptive social novel, the documentary. This creates, as priority, a general way of life, a particular social or working community. Within this, of course, are characters, sometimes quite carefully drawn. But what we say about such novels is that if we want to know about life in a mining town, or in a university, or on a merchant ship, or on a patrol in Burma, this is the book. In fact many novels of this kind are valuable; the good documentary is usually interesting. It is right that novels of this kind should go on being written, and with the greatest possible variety of setting. Yet the dimension that we miss is obvious: the characters are miners, dons, soldiers

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first; illustrations of the way of life. It is not the emphasis I have been trying to describe, in which the persons are of absolute interest in themselves, and are yet seen as parts of a whole way of living. Nor is this dimension to be gained, suddenly, by the usual arbitrary device; inserting, say, into a novel about atomic scientists (C. P. Snow's *The New Men*) a little identifying personal life; usually, in fact, a little usual sex. Of all current kinds of novel, this kind, at its best, is *apparently* nearest to what I am calling the realist novel, but, though I admire much of Snow's work, and some similar work, the crucial distinction is quite apparent in reading: the social-descriptive function is in fact the shaping priority.

A very lively kind of social novel, quite different from this, is now significantly popular. The tenor, here, is not description, but the finding and materialization of a *formula* about society. A particular pattern is abstracted, from the sum of social experience, and a society is created from the pattern. The simplest examples are in the field of the future-story, where the "future" device (usually only a device, for nearly always it is obviously contemporary society that is being written about; indeed this is becoming the main way of writing about social experience) removes the ordinary tension between the selected pattern and normal observation. *Brave New World, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Fahrenheit* 451, are powerful social fiction, in which a pattern taken from contemporary society is materialized, as a whole, in another time or place. Other examples are Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors,* and nearly all serious "science fiction." Most of these are written to resemble realistic novels, and operate in the same essential terms. Most of them contain, fundamentally, a conception of the relation between individuals and society; ordinarily a virtuous individual, or small personal group, against a vile society. The action, normally, is a release of tensions in this personal-social complex, but I say release, and not working-out, because ordinarily the device subtly alters the tensions, places them in a preselected light, so that it is not so much that they are explored but indulged. The experience of isolation, of alienation, and of self-exile is an important part of the contemporary structure of feeling, and any contemporary realist novel would have to come to real terms with it. (It is ironic, incidentally, that it was come to terms with, and worked to a resolution very different from the contemporary formula

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of "exile versus masses; stalemate," at several points in the realist tradition, notably in *Crime and Punishment* and, through Bezukhov, in *War and Peace.*) Our formula novels are lively, because they are about lively social feeling, but the obvious dimension they lack is that of a substantial society, and, correspondingly substantial persons. The common life is an abstraction and the personal lives are defined by their function in the formula.

The "realist" novel divided into the "social" and the "personal," and the "social novel," in our time, has further divided into social documentary and social formula. It is true that examples of these kinds can be found from earlier periods, but they were never, as now, the modes. The same point holds for the "personal novel," and its corresponding division into documentary and formula. Some of the best novels of our time are those which describe, carefully and subtly, selected personal relationships. These are often very like *parts* of the realist novel as described, and there is a certain continuity of method and substance. Forster's *Passage to India* is a good example, with traces of the older balance still clearly visible, yet belonging, in a high place, in this divided kind, because of elements in the Indian society of the novel which romanticize the actual society in the needs of certain of the characters. This is quite common in this form: a society, a general way of living, is apparently there, but is in fact often a highly personalized landscape, to clarify or frame an individual portrait, rather than a country within which the individuals are actually contained. Graham Greene's social settings are obvious examples: his Brighton, West Africa, Mexico and Indo-China have major elements in common which relate not to their actual ways of life but to the needs of his characters and of his own emotional pattern. When this is frankly and absolutely done, as in Kafka, there is at least no confusion; but ordinarily, with a surface of realism, there is merely the familiar unbalance. There is a lack of dimension similar to that in the social-descriptive novel, but in a different direction. There the characters were aspects of the society; here the society is an aspect of the characters. The balance we remember is that in which both the general way of life and the individual persons are seen as there and absolute.

Of course, in many personal novels, often very good in their own terms, the general way of life does not appear even in this partial

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guise, but as a simple backcloth, of shopping and the outbreak of war and busses and odd minor characters from another social class. Society is outside the people, though at times, even violently, it breaks in on them. Now of course, where there is deliberate selection, deliberate concentration, such personal novels are valuable, since there is a vast field of significant experience, of a directly personal kind, which can be excitingly explored. But it seems to me that for every case of conscious selection (as in Proust, say, where the concentration is entirely justified and yet produces, obliquely, a master-portrait of a general way of life) there are perhaps a thousand cases where the restriction is simply a failure of consciousness, a failure to realize the extent to which the substance of a general way of life actively affects the closest personal experience. Of course if, to these writers, society has become the dull abstract thing of the social novel at its worst, it is not surprising that they do not see why it should concern them. They insist on the people as people first, and not as social units, and they are quite right to do so. What is missing, however, is that element of common substance which again and again the great realists seemed able to apprehend. Within the small group, personality is valued, but outside the group it is nothing. We are people, one sometimes hears between the lines; to *us* these things are important; but the strange case of the Virginia Woolf charwoman or village woman, with the sudden icy drop in the normally warm sensibility, symbolizes a common limitation. And this is not only social exclusiveness or snobbery, though it can be diagnosed in such ways, but also a failure to realize the nature of the general social element in *their own lives*. We are people (such novels say), people, just like that; the rest is the world or society or politics or something, dull things that are written about in the newspapers. But in fact we are people and people within a society: that whole view was at the center of the realist novel.

In spite of its limitations, the personal-descriptive novel is often a substantial achievement, but the tendencies evident in it seem increasingly to be breaking it down, into the other personal kind, the novel of the personal formula. Here, as in the novel of social formula, a particular pattern is abstracted from the sum of experience, and not now a society, but human individuals, are created from the pattern. This has been the method of powerful, and in its own terms, valid fiction, but it seems to me to be rapidly creating a new mode, the

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fiction of special pleading. We can say of novels in this class that they only take one person seriously, but then ordinarily very seriously indeed. Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* is not only this, but contains it as a main emphasis. And to mention this remarkable work is to acknowledge the actual gain in intensity, the real development of fictional method, which this emphasis embodied. A world is actualized on one man's senses: not narrated, or held at arm's length, but taken as it is lived. Joyce showed the magnificent advantages of this method when in *Ulysses* he actualized a world not through one person but through three; there are three ways of seeing, three worlds, of Stephen, Bloom, and Molly, yet the three worlds, as in fact, compose one world, the whole world of the novel. *Ulysses* does not maintain this balance throughout; it is mainly in the first third of the book that the essential composition is done, with the last section as a coda. Yet here was the realist tradition in a new form, altered in technique but continuous in experience.

Since *Ulysses,* this achievement has been diluted, as the technique has also been diluted. Cary's *The Horse's Mouth* is an interesting example, for in it one way of seeing has been isolated, and the world fitted to that. This analysis is also the key to the popular new kind of novel represented by Amis's *That Uncertain Feeling* and Wain's *Living in the Present.* The paradox of these novels is that on the one hand they seem the most real kind of contemporary writing — they were welcomed because they recorded so many actual feelings — and yet on the other hand their final version of reality is parodic and farcical. This illustrates the general dilemma: these writers start with real personal feelings, but to sustain and substantiate them, in their given form, the world of action in which they operate has to be pressed, as it were inevitably, towards caricature. To set these feelings in our actual world, rather than in this world farcically transformed at crisis, would be in fact to question the feelings, to go on from them to a very difficult adjustment to reality. Instead of this real tension, what we get is a phantasy release: swearing on the telephone, giving a mock-lecture, finding a type-figure on which aggression can be concentrated. Because these are our liveliest writers, they illustrate our contemporary difficulty most clearly. The gap between our feelings and our social observation is dangerously wide.

The fiction of special pleading can be seen in its clearest form

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in those many contemporary novels which, taking one person's feelings and needs as absolute, create other persons in these sole terms. The method goes back to Charlotte Bronte, and flourishes in the now significantly popular first-person narrative, which is normally used simply for this end. *Huckleberry Finn,* in its middle sections, creates a general reality within which the personal narrative gains breadth. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* has a saving irony, yet lacks this other dimension, a limitation increasingly obvious as the novel proceeds. Braine's *Room at the Top* breaks down altogether, because there is no other reality to refer to; we are left with the familiar interaction of crudity and self-pity, a negative moral gesture at best. Compare, for example, Carson McCullers' *Member of the Wedding,* which has this realist dimension, and in which the reality of personal feeling, growing into phantasy, interacts at the necessary tension with the world in which the feelings must be lived out. Or again, on the opposite side, there is Sagan's *Bonjour Tristesse,* where the persons are presented almost objectively, but are then made to act in accordance with the phantasy of the central character. A comparison of McCullers and Sagan is the comparison of realism and its breakdown. And it is the breakdown, unfortunately, of which we have most examples; the first-person narrative, on which so much technical brilliance has been lavished, is now ordinarily the mechanism of rationalizing this breakdown. The fiction of special pleading extends, however, into novels still formally resembling the realist kind. In Bowen's *Heat of the Day,* the persons exist primarily as elements in the central character's emotional landscape, and are never seen or valued in any other terms, though there is no first-person narrative, and there is even some careful descriptive realism, to make the special pleading less stark. The same pattern, finally, can be extended into what looks like a deliberate attempt to recreate the realist novel, Angus Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes,* where a whole society is carefully, even artificially, constructed, yet where finally only one character, Gerald Middleton, is fully and consistently observed, while the others fall away into graded levels of caricature, according to their distance from him. As it is now developing, the personal novel ends by denying the majority of persons. The reality of society is excluded, and this leads, inevitably, in the end, to the exclusion of all but a very few individual people. It is not surprising, in these circum-

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stances, that so much of the personal feeling described should be in fact the experience of breakdown.

I offer this fourfold classification — social description, social formula, personal description, personal formula — as a way of beginning a general analysis of the contemporary novel, and of defining, by contrast, the realist tradition which, in various ways, these kinds have replaced. The question now is whether these kinds correspond to some altered reality, leaving the older tradition as really irrelevant as the hansom cab, or whether they are in fact the symptoms of some very deep crisis in experience, which throws up these talented works yet persists, unexplored, and leaves us essentially dissatisfied. I would certainly not say that the abandonment of the realist balance is in some way willful; that these writers are deliberately turning away from a great tradition, with the perversity that many puzzled readers assign to them. The crisis, as I see it, is too deep for any simple, blaming explanation. But what then is this crisis, in its general nature?

There are certain immediate clarifying factors. The realist novel needs, obviously, a genuine community: a community of persons linked not merely by one kind of relationship — work, friendship, family — but by many, interlocking kinds. It is obviously difficult, in the twentieth century, to find a community of this sort. Where *Middlemarch* is a complex of personal, family and working relationships, and draws its whole strength from their interaction in an indivisible process, the links between persons in most contemporary novels are relatively single, temporary, discontinuous. And this was a change in society, at least in that part of society most nearly available to most novelists, before it was a change in literary form. Again, related to this, but affected by other powerful factors,the characteristic experience of our century is that of asserting and preserving an individuality, as compared with the characteristic earlier experience of finding a place and making a settlement. The ordinary Victorian novel ends, as every parodist knows, with a series of settlements, of new engagements and formal relationships, whereas the ordinary twentieth-century novel ends with a man going away on his own, having extricated himself from a dominating situation, and found himself in so doing. Again, this actually happened, before it became a common literary pattern. In a time of great change, this kind of extrication and discovery was a necessary and valuable movement; the recorded individual histories

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amount to a common history. And while old establishments linger, and new establishments of a dominating kind are continually instituted, the breakaway has continually to be made, the personal assertion given form and substance, even to the point where it threatens to become the whole content of our literature. Since I know the pressures, I admit the responses, but my case is that we are reaching deadlock, and that to expore a new definition of realism may be the way to break out of the deadlock and find a creative direction.

The contemporary novel has both reflected and illuminated the crisis of our society, and of course we could fall back on the argument that only a different society could resolve our literary problems. Yet literature is committed to the detail of known experience, and only valuable social change would be the same kind of practical and responsible discipline. We begin by identifying our actual situation, and the critical point, as I see it, is precisely that separation of the individual and society into absolutes, which we have seen reflected in form. The truly creative effort of our time is the struggle for relationships, of a whole kind, and it is possible to see this as both personal and social: the practical learning of *extending* relationships. Realism, as embodied in its great tradition, is a touchstone in this, for it shows, in detail, that vital interpenetration, idea into feeling, person into community, change into settlement, which we need, as growing points, in our own divided time. In the highest realism, society is seen in fundamentally personal terms, and persons, through relationships, in fundamentally social terms. The integration is controlling, yet of course it is not to be achieved by an act of will. If it comes at all, it is a creative discovery, and can perhaps only be recorded within the structure and substance of the realist novel.

Yet, since it is discovery, and not recovery, since nostalgia and imitation are not only irrelevant, but hindering, any new realism will be different from the tradition, and will comprehend the discoveries in personal realism which are the main twentieth-century achievement. The point can be put theoretically, in relation to modern discoveries in perception and communication. The old, naive realism is in any case dead, for it depended on a theory of natural seeing which is now impossible. When we thought we had only to open our eyes to see a common world, we could suppose that realism was a

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simple recording process, from which any deviation was voluntary. We know now that we literally create the world we see, and that this human creation — a discovery of how we can live in the material world we inhabit — is necessarily dynamic and active; the old static realism of the passive observer is merely a hardened convention. When it was first discovered that man lives through his perceptual world, which is a human interpretation of the material world outside him, this was thought to be a basis for the rejection of realism; only a personal vision was possible. But art is more than perception; it is a particular kind of active response, and a part of all human communication. Reality, in our terms, is that which human beings make common, by work or language. Thus, in the very acts of perception and communication, this practical interaction of what is personally seen, interpreted and organized and what can be socially recognized, known and formed is richly and subtly manifested. It is very difficult to grasp this fundamental interaction, but here, undoubtedly, is the clue we seek, not only in our thinking about personal vision and social communication, but also in our thinking about the individual and society. The individual inherits an evolved brain, which gives him his common human basis. He learns to see, through this inheritance, and through the forms which his culture teaches. But, since the learning is active, and since the world he is watching is changing and being changed, new acts of perception, interpretation and organization are not only possible, but deeply necessary. This is human growth, in personal terms, but the essential growth is in the interaction which then can occur, in the individual's effort to communicate what he has learned, to match it with known reality and by work and language to make a new reality. Reality is continually established, by common effort, and art is one of the highest forms of this process. Yet the tension can be great, in the necessarily difficult struggle to establish reality, and many kinds of failure and breakdown are possible. It seems to me that in a period of exceptional growth, as ours has been and will continue to be, the tension will be exceptionally high, and certain kinds of failure and breakdown may become characteristic. The recording of creative effort, to explore such breakdowns, is not always easy to distinguish from the simple, often rawly exciting exploitation of breakdown. Or else there is a turning away, into known forms, which remind us of previously learned realities and seek, by

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this reminder, to establish probability of a kind. Thus the tension can either be lowered, as in the ordinary social novel, or played on, as in the ordinary personal novel. Either result is a departure from realism, in the sense that I am offering. For realism is precisely this living tension, achieved in a communicable form. Whether this is seen as a problem of the individual in society, or as a problem of the offered description and the known description, the creative challenge is similar. The achievement of realism is a continual achievement of balance, and the ordinary absence of balance, in the forms of the contemporary novel, can be seen as both a warning and a challenge. It is certain that any effort to achieve a contemporary balance will be complex and difficult, but the effort is necessary, a new realism is necessary, if we are to remain creative.

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Diana Trilling

THE OTHER NIGHT AT COLUMBIA: A REPORT FROM THE ACADEMY

The "beats" were to read their poetry at Columbia on Thursday evening and on the spur of the moment three wives from the English department had decided to go to hear them. But for me, one of the three, the spur of the moment was not where the story had begun. It had begun much farther back, some twelve or fourteen years ago, when Allen Ginsberg had been a student at Columbia and I had heard about him much more than I usually hear of students for the simple reason that he got into a great deal of trouble which involved his instructors, and had to be rescued and revived and restored; eventually he had even to be kept out of jail. Of course there was always the question, should this young man be rescued, should he be restored? There was even the question, shouldn't he go to jail? We argued about it some at home but the discussion, I'm afraid, was academic, despite my old resistance to the idea that people like Ginsberg had the right to ask and receive preferential treatment just because they read Rimbaud and Gide and undertook to put words on paper themselves. Nor was my principle (if one may call it that) of equal responsibility for poets and shoe clerks so firm that I didn't need to protect it by refusing to confront Ginsberg as an individual or potential acquaintance. I don't mean that I was aware, at the time, of this motive for disappearing on the two or three occasions when he came to the house to deliver a new batch of poems and report on his latest adventures in sensation-seeking. If I'd been asked to explain, then, my wish not to meet and talk with this troublesome young man who had managed to break through the barrier of student anonymity, I suppose I'd have rested with the proposition that I don't like mess, and I'd have been ready to defend myself against the charge, made in the name of art, of a strictness of judgment which

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was intolerant of this much deviation from respectable standards of behavior. Ten, twelve, fourteen years ago, there was still something of a challenge in the "conventional" position; I still enjoyed defending the properties and proprieties of the middle class against friends who persisted in scorning them. Of course, once upon a time — but that was in the '30's — one had had to defend even having a comfortable chair to sit in, or a rug on the floor. But by the '40's things had changed; one's most intransigent literary friends had capitulated by then, everybody had a well-upholstered sofa and I was reduced to such marginal causes as the Metropolitan Museum, after-dinner coffee cups, and the expectation that visitors would go home by 2 A.M. and put their ashes in the ashtrays. Then why should I not also defend the expectation that a student at Columbia, even a poet, would do his work, submit it to his teachers through the normal channels of classroom communication, stay out of jail, and then, if things went right, graduate, start publishing, be reviewed, and see what developed, whether he was a success or failure?

Well, for Ginsberg, things didn't go right for quite a while. The time came when he was graduated from Columbia and published his poems, but first he got into considerable difficulty, beginning with his suspension from college and the requirement that he submit to psychiatric treatment, and terminating — but this was quite a few years later — in an encounter with the police from which he was extricated by some of his old teachers who thought he needed a hospital more than a prison. The suspension had been for a year, when Ginsberg had been a Senior; the situation was not without its grim humor. It seems that Ginsberg had traced an obscenity in the dusty windows of Hartley Hall; the words were too shocking for the Dean of Students to speak, he had written them on a piece of paper which he pushed across the desk: "F - - - the Jews." Even the part of Lionel that wanted to laugh couldn't, it was too hard for the Dean to have to transmit this message to a Jewish professor — this was still in the '40's when being a Jew in the university was not yet what it is today. "But he's a Jew himself," said the Dean. "Can you understand his writing a thing like that?" Yes, Lionel could understand; but he couldn't explain it to the Dean. And anyway he knew that the legend in the dust of Hartley Hall required more than an understanding of Jewish self-hatred and also that it was not the sole

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cause for administrative uneasiness about Ginsberg and his cronies. It was ordinary good sense for the college to take therapeutic measures with Ginsberg.

I now realize that even at this early point in his career I had already accumulated a fund of information about young Ginsberg which accurately forecast his present talent for self-promotion although it was surely disproportionate to the place he commanded in his teacher's mind and quite contradicted the uncertain physical impression I had caught in opening the door to him when he came to the apartment. He was middling tall, slight, dark, sallow; his dress suggested shabby gentility, poor brown tweed gone threadbare and yellow. The description would have fitted any number of undergraduates of his or any Columbia generation; it was the personal story that set him acutely apart. He came from New Jersey where his father was a school teacher, or perhaps a principal, who himself wrote poetry too — I think for the *New York Times,* which would be as good a way as any of defining the separation between father and son. His mother was in a mental institution, and, off and on, she had been there for a long time. This was the central and utterly persuasive fact of this young man's life; I knew this before I was told it in poetry at Columbia the other night, and doubtless it was this knowledge that underlay the nervous irritability with which I responded to so much as the mention of Ginsberg's name. Here was a boy to whom an outrageous injustice had been done: his mother had gone mad on him, and now whoever crossed his path became somehow responsible, guilty, caught in the impossibility of rectifying what she had done. It was an unfair burden to put on those who were only the later accidents of his history and it made me more defensive than charitable with this poor object of her failure. No boy, after all, could ask anyone to help him build a career on the terrible but gratuitous circumstance of a mad mother; it was a justification for neither poetry nor prose nor yet for "philosophy" of the kind young Ginsberg liked to expound to his teacher. In the question period which followed the poetry-reading the other night at Columbia, this matter of a rationale for the behavior of Ginsberg and his friends came up: someone asked Ginsberg to state his philosophy. It was a moment I had been awaiting and I thought: "Here we go; he'll tell us how he's crazy like a daisy and how his friend Orlovsky is crazy like a butterfly." I had been reading

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Time magazine; who hadn't? But, instead, Ginsberg answered that he had no philosophy; he spoke of inspiration, or perhaps it was illumination, ecstatic illumination, as the source of his poetry and I was more than surprised, I was curiously pleased for him because I took it as a considerable advance in self-control that he could operate with this much shrewdness and leave it, at least for this occasion, to his audience to abstract a "position" from his and his friends' antics while he himself moved wild, mild, and innocent through the jungle of speculation. Back in the older days, it had always been my feeling that so far as his relationship with his teacher was concerned, this trying to formulate a philosophy must reveal its falseness even to himself, so that his recourse to it insulted his intelligence. Two motives, it seemed to me, impelled him then: the wish to shock his teacher, and the wish to meet the teacher on equal ground. The first of these motives was complicated enough, involving as it did the gratifications of self-incrimination and disapproval, and then forgiveness; but the second was more tangled still. To talk with one's English professor who was also a writer, a critic, and one who made no bones about his solid connection with literary tradition, about one's descent from Rimbaud, Baudelaire or Dostoevsky was clearly to demonstrate a good-sized rationality and order in what was apparently an otherwise undisciplined life. Even more, or so I fancied, it was to propose an alliance between the views of the academic and the poet-rebel, the unity of a deep discriminating commitment to literature which must certainly one day wipe out the fortuitous distance between boy and man, pupil and teacher. Thus, Ginsberg standing on the platform at Columbia and refusing the philosophy gambit might well be taken as an impulse toward manhood, or at least manliness, for which one might be grateful.

But I remind myself: Ginsberg at Columbia on Thursday night was not Ginsberg at Chicago — according to *Time,* at any rate — or Ginsberg at Hunter either, where Kerouac ran the show and a dismal show it must have been, with Kerouac drinking on the platform and clapping James Wechsler's hat on his head in a grand parade of contempt — they were two of four panelists gathered to discuss, "Is there such a thing as a beat generation?" — and leading Ginsberg out from the wings like a circus donkey. For whatever reason — rumor had it he was in a personal crisis — Kerouac didn't appear

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on Thursday night, and Ginsberg at Columbia was Ginsberg his own man, dealing with his own history, and intent, it seemed to me, on showing up the past for the poor inaccurate thing it so often is: it's a chance we all dream of but mostly it works the other way around, like the long-ago story of Jed Harris coming back to Yale and sitting on the fence weeping for a youth he could never re-write no matter how many plays of Chekhov he brought to Broadway, no matter how much money he made. I suppose I have no right to say now, and on such early and little evidence, that Ginsberg had always desperately wanted to be respectable, or respected, like his instructors at Columbia, it is so likely that this is a hindsight which suits my needs. It struck me, though, that this was the most unmistakable and touching message from platform to audience the other night, and as I received it, I felt I had known something like it all along. Not that Ginsberg had ever shown himself as a potential future colleague in the university; anything but that. Even the implied literary comradeship had had reference, not to any possibility of Ginsberg's assimilation into the community of professors, but to the professor's capacity for association in the community of rebellious young poets. Still, it was not just anyone on the campus to whom Ginsberg had come with his lurid boasts which were also his confession; it was Lionel, it was Mark Van Doren; if there was anyone else he would very likely be of the same respectable species, and I remember saying, "He wants you to forbid him to behave like that. He wants you to take him out of it, else why does he choose people like you and Mark to tell these stories to?" To which I received always the same answer, "I'm not his father," with which there could of course be no argument.

And yet, even granting the accuracy of this reconstruction of the past, it would be wrong to conclude that any consideration of motive on Ginsberg's part was sufficiently strong to alter one's first and most forceful image of Ginsberg as a "case" — a gifted and sad case, a guilt-provoking and nuisance case but, above all, a case. Nor was it a help that Lionel had recently published a story about a crazy student and a supposedly normal student in which the author's affection was so plainly directed to the former; we never became used to the calls, often in the middle of the night, asking whether it wasn't the crazy character who was really sane. Ginsberg, with his poems in which there was never quite enough talent or hard work, and with his am-

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biguous need to tell his teacher exactly what new flagrancy he was now exploring with his Gide-talking friends at the West End Café had at any rate the distinction of being more crudely justified in his emotional disturbance than most; he also had the distinction of carrying mental unbalance in the direction of criminality, a territory one preferred to leave unclaimed by student or friend.

Gide and the West End Café in all its upper-Broadway dreariness: what could the two conceivably have in common except those lost boys of the '40's? How different it might have been for Ginsberg and his friends if they had come of age ten or fifteen years sooner was one of the particular sadnesses of the other evening, it virtually stood on the platform with them as the poets read their poems whose chief virtue, it seemed to me, was their "racial-minority" funniness, their "depressed-classes" funniness of a kind which has never had so sure and live a place as it did in the '30's, the embittered fond funniness which has to do with one's own awful family, funniness plain and poetical, always aware of itself, of a kind which would seem now to have all but disappeared among intellectuals except as an eclecticism or a device of self-pity. It's a real loss; I hadn't quite realized how much I missed it until Thursday night when Ginsberg read his poem, "The Ignu," and Corso read his poem, "Marriage" (a compulsive poem, he called it, about a compulsive subject) and they were still funny in that old racial depressed way but not nearly as funny and authentic as they would have been had they been written before the Jews and the Italians and the Negroes, but especially the Jews, had been crammed down their own and everyone else's throat as Americans-like-everyone-else instead of outsiders raised in the Bronx or on Ninth Avenue or even in Georgia. The Jew in particular is a loss to literature and life — I mean the Jew out of which was bred the Jewish intellectual of the '30's. For a few short years in the '30's, as not before or since, the Jew was at his funniest, wisest best; he perfectly well knew the advantage he could count on in the Gentile world, and that there was no ascendancy or pride the Gentile comrades could muster against a roomful of Jewish sympathizers singing at the tops of their voices, "A SOCialist union is a NO good union, is a COM-pan-y union of the bosses," or against Michael Gold's mother who wanted to know did her boy have to write books the whole world should know **she had** bedbugs. If Ginsberg had

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been born in an earlier generation it would surely have been the Stewart Cafeteria in the Village that he and his friends would have hung out at instead of the West End, that dim waystation of undergraduate debauchery on Morningside Heights — and the Stewart Cafeteria was a well-lighted place and one of the funniest places in New York; at least, at every other table it was funny, and where it was decadent or even conspiratorial, this had its humor too, or at least its robustness. As for Gide — the Gide of the '30's was the "betrayer of the Revolution," not the Gide of the *acte gratuite* and homosexuality in North Africa. One didn't use pathology in those days to explain or excuse or exhibit oneself and one never had to be lonely; there was never a less lonely time for intellectuals than the Depression, or a less depressed time — unless, of course, one was recalcitrant, like Fitzgerald, and simply refused to be radicalized, in which stubborn case it couldn't have been lonelier. Intellectuals talk now about how, in the '30's, there was an "idea" in life, not the emptiness we live in. Actually, it was a time of generally weak intellection — so many of us who put our faith in Marx and Lenin had read neither of them — but of very strong feeling. Everyone judged everyone else, it was a time of incessant cruel moral judgment; today's friend was tomorrow's enemy; whoever disagreed with oneself had sold out, God knows to or for what, maybe for $10 more a week; there was little of the generosity among intellectuals which nowadays dictates the automatic, "Gee, that's great" at any news of someone else's good fortune. But it was surely a time of quicker, truer feeling than is now conjured up with marijuana or the infantile cameraderie of *On The Road*. And there was paradox but no contradiction in this double truth, just as there was no contradiction in the fact that it was a time in which the neurotic determination of the intellectual was being so universally acted out and yet a time in which, whatever his dedication to historical or economic determinism, personally he had a unique sense of free will. In the '30's one's clinical vocabulary was limited to two words — escapism and subjectivism — and both of them applied only to other people's wrong political choices.

Well, the "beats" weren't lucky enough to be born except when they were born. Ginsberg says he lives in Harlem, but it's not the Harlem of the Scottsboro boys and W. C. Handy and the benign insanity of trying to proletarianize Striver's Row; their comrades are

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not the comrades of the Stewart Cafeteria nor yet of the road, as Kerouac would disingenuously have it, but pick-ups on dark morning streets. But they have their connection with us who were young in the '30's, their intimate political connection, which we deny at risk of missing what it is that makes the "beat" phenomenon something to think about. As they used to say on 14th Street, it is no accident, comrades, it is decidedly no accident that today in the '50's our single overt manifestation of protest takes the wholly non-political form of a bunch of panic-stricken kids in blue jeans, many of them publicly homosexual, talking about or taking drugs, assuring us that they are out of their minds, not responsible, while the liberal intellectual is convinced that he has no power to control the political future, the future of the free world, and that therefore he must submit to what he defines as political necessity. Though of course the various aspects of a culture must be granted their own autonomous source and character, the connection between "beat" and respectable liberal intellectual exists and is not hard to locate: the common need to deny free will, divest oneself of responsibility and yet stay alive. The typical liberal intellectual of the '50's, whether he be a writer for *Partisan Review* or a law school professor or a magazine or newspaper editor, explains his evolution over the last two decades — specifically, his present attitude toward "co-existence" — by telling us that he has been forced to accept the unhappy reality of Soviet strength in an atomic world, and that there is no alternative to capitulation — not that he calls it that — except the extinction of nuclear war. Even the diplomacy he invokes is not so much flexible, which he would like to think it is, as disarmed and, hopefully, disarming, an instrument of his impulse to surrender rather than of any wish to dominate or even of his professed wish to hold the line. Similarly docile to culture, the "beat" also contrives a fate by predicating a fate. Like the respectable established intellectual — or the organization man, or the suburban matron — against whom he makes his play of protest, he conceives of himself as incapable of exerting any substantive influence against the forces that condition him. He is made by society, he cannot make society. He can only stay alive as best he can for as long as is permitted him. Is it any wonder, then, that *Time* and *Life* write as they do about the "beats" — with such a conspicuous show of superiority, and no hint of fear? These periodicals know what genuine,

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dangerous protest looks like, and it doesn't look like Ginsberg and Kerouac. Clearly, there is no more menace in *Howl* or *On The Road* than there is in the Scarsdale PTA. In the common assumption of effectlessness, in the apparent will to rest with a social determination over which the individual spirit and intelligence cannot and perhaps even should not try to triumph, there merege any number of the disparate elements of our present culture — from the liberal intellectual journals to Luce to the Harvard Law School, from Ginsberg to the suburban matron.

But then why, one ponders, do one's most relaxed and non-square friends, alongside of whom one can oneself be made to look like the original object with four sides of equal length; why do one's most politically "flexible" friends, alongside of whom one's own divergence from dominant liberal opinion is regularly made to look so ungraceful, so like a latter-day sectarianism, even a fanaticism, feel constrained to dispute Columbia's judgment in giving the "beats" a hearing on the campus and my own wish to attend their poetry-reading? Why, for instance, the dissent of Dwight MacDonald, whom I happened to see that afternoon; or of W. H. Auden, who, when I said I had been moved by the performance, gently chided me, "I'm ashamed of you"; or of William Phillips who, although he tells me yes, I may go ahead with this article, can't hide his puzzlement, even worry, because I want to give the "beats" this kind of attention? In strict logic, it would seem to me that things should go in quite the other direction and that I, who insist upon at least the assumption of free will in our political dealings with Russia, who insist upon what I call political responsibility, should be the one to protest a university forum for the irresponsibles whereas my friends whose politics are what I think of as finally a politics of victimization, of passivity and fatedness, should be able to shrug off the "beats" as merely another inevitable, if tasteless, expression of a *Zeitgeist* with which I believe them to be far more in tune than I am. I do not mean, of course, to rule out taste, or style, as a valid criterion of moral judgment. A sense of social overwhelmment which announces itself in terms of disreputableness or even criminality asks for a different kind of moral assessment than the same emotion kept within the bounds of acceptable social expression. But I would simply point to the similarities which are masked by these genuine moral differences

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between the "beats" and my friends who would caution us against them. Taste or style dictates that most intellectuals behave decorously, earn a regular living, disguise instead of flaunt whatever may be their private digressions from the conduct society considers desirable; when they seek support for the poetical impulse or ask for light on their self-doubt and fears, they don't make the naked boast that they are crazy like daisies but they elaborate a new belief in the indispensability of neurosis to art, or beat the bushes for some new deviant psychoanalysis which will generalize their despair without curing it. And these differences of style are of course important, at least for the moment. It is from the long-range, and no doubt absolute, view of our immediate cultural situation, which bears so closely upon our continuing national crisis, that the moral difference between a respectable and a disreputable acceptance of defeat seems to me to constitute little more than a cultural footnote to history.

But perhaps I wander too far from the other night at Columbia. There was enough in the evening that was humanly immediate to divert one from this kind of ultimate concern. . . .

It was not an official university occasion. The "beats" appeared at Columbia on the invitation of a student club — interestingly enough, the John Dewey Society. Whether the club first approached Ginsberg or Ginsberg initiated the proceedings, I don't know, but what had happened was that Ginsberg in his undergraduate days had taken a loan from the university — $200? $250? — and recently the Bursar's office had caught up with him in his new incarnation of successful literary itinerant, to demand repayment. Nothing if not ingenious, Ginsberg now proposed to pay off his debt by reading his poetry at Columbia without fee. It was at this point that various members of the English department, solicited as sponsors for the operation, had announced their rejection of the whole deal, literary as well as financial, and the performance was arranged without financial benefit to Ginsberg and without official cover; we three wives, however, decided to attend on our own. We would meet at 7:45 at the door of the theater; no, we would meet at 7:40 at the door of the theater; no, we would meet no later than 7:30 across the street from the theater: the telephoning back and forth among the three women was stupendous as word spread of vast barbarian hordes converging on poor dull McMillin Theater from all

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the dark recesses of the city, howling for their leader. The advance warnings turned out to be exaggerated; it was nevertheless disconcerting to be associated with such goings-on, and the fact that Fred Dupee, at the request of the John Dewey Society, had consented to be moderator, chairman, introducer of Ginsberg and his fellow-poets, while it provided the wives of his colleagues with the assurance of seats in a section of the hall reserved for faculty, was not without its uncomfortable reminder that Ginsberg had, in a sense, got his way; he was appearing on the same Columbia platform from which T. S. Eliot had last year read his poetry; he was being presented by, and was thus bound to be thought under the sponsorship of, an important person in the academic and literary community who was also one's long-time friend. And indeed it was as Dupee's friend that one took a first canvass of the scene: the line of policemen before the entrance to the theater; the air of suppressed excitement in the lobbies and one's own rather contemptible self-consciousness about being seen ir such a crowd; the shoddiness of an audience in which it was virtually impossible to distinguish between student and camp-follower; the always-new shock of so many young girls, so few of them pretty, and so many dreadful black stockings; so many young men, so few of them — despite the many black beards — with any promise of masculinity. It was distressing to think that Dupee was going to be "faculty" to this rabble, that at this moment he was backstage with Ginsberg & Co., formulating a deportment which would check the excess of which one knew them to be capable, even or especially in public, without doing violence to his own large tolerance.

For me, it was of some note that the auditorium smelled fresh. The place was already full when we arrived; I took one look at the crowd and was certain that it would smell bad. But I was mistaken. These people may think they're dirty inside and dress up to it. Nevertheless, they smell all right. The audience was clean and Ginsberg was clean and Corso was clean and Orlovsky was clean. Maybe Ginsberg says he doesn't bathe or shave; Corso, I know, declares that he has never combed his hair; Orlovsky has a line in one of the two poems he read — he's not yet written his third, the chairman explained — "If I should shave, I know the bugs would go away." But for this occasion, at any rate, Ginsberg, Corso and Orlovsky were all clean and shaven; Kerouac, in crisis, didn't appear, but if he had come he

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would have been clean and shaven too — he was at Hunter, I've inquired about that. And anyway, there's nothing dirty about a checked shirt or a lumberjacket and blue jeans, they're standard uniform in the best nursery schools. Ginsberg has his pride, as do his friends.

And how do I look to the "beats," I ask myself after that experience with the seats, and not only I but the other wives I was with? We had pulled aside the tattered old velvet rope which marked off the section held for faculty, actually it was trailing on the floor, and moved into the seats Dupee's wife Andy had saved for us by strewing coats on them; there was a big grey overcoat she couldn't identify: she stood holding it up in the air murmuring wistfully, "Whose is this?" — until the young people in the row in back of us took account of us and answered sternly, "*Those* seats are reserved for faculty." If I have trouble unraveling undergraduates from "beats," neither do the wives of the Columbia English department wear their distinction with any certainty.

But Dupee's distinction, that's something else again: what could I have been worrying about, when had Dupee ever failed to meet the occasion, or missed a right style? I don't suppose one could witness a better performance than his on Thursday evening; its rightness was apparent the moment he walked onto the stage, his troupe in tow and himself just close enough and just enough removed to indicate the balance in which he held the situation. Had there been a hint of betrayal in his deportment, of either himself or his guests — naturally, he had made them his guests — the whole evening might have been different: for instance, a few minutes later when the overflow attendance outside the door began to bang and shout for admission, might not the audience have caught the contagion and become unruly too? Or would Ginsberg have stayed with his picture of himself as poet serious and triumphant instead of succumbing to what must have been the greatest temptation to spoil his opportunity? "The last time I was in this theater," Dupee began quietly, "it was also to hear a poet read his works. That was T. S. Eliot." A slight alteration of inflection, from irony to mockery, from condescension to contempt, and it might well have been a signal for near-riot, boos and catcalls and whistlings; the evening would have been lost to the "beats," Dupee and Columbia would have been defeated. Dupee transformed a circus into a class-

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room. He himself, he said, welcomed the chance to hear these poets read their works — he never once in his remarks gave them their name of "beats" nor alluded even to San Francisco — because in all poetry it was important to study the spoken accent; he himself didn't happen especially to admire those of their works that he knew; still, he would draw our attention to their skillful use of a certain kind of American imagery which, deriving from Whitman, yet passed Whitman's use it or even Hart Crane's. . . . It was Dupee speaking for the Academy, claiming for it its place in life, and the performers were inevitably captive to his dignity and self-assurance. Rather than Ginsberg and his friends, it was a photographer from *Life,* exploding his flashbulbs in everybody's face, mounting a ladder at the back of the stage the more effectively to shoot his angles, who came to represent vulgarity and disruption and disrespect; when a student in the audience disconnected a wire which had something to do with the picture-taking, one guessed that Ginsberg was none too happy but it was the photographer's face that became ugly, the only real ugliness of the evening. One could feel nothing but pity for Ginsberg and his friends that their front of disreputableness and rebellion should be this transparent, this vulnerable to the seductions of a clever host. With Dupee's introduction, the whole of their defense had been penetrated at the very outset.

Pity is not the easiest of our emotions today; now it's understanding that is easy, and more and more — or so I find it for myself — real pity moves hand-in-hand with real terror; it's an emotion one avoids because it's so hard; one understands the cripple, the delinquent, the unhappy so as not to have to pity them. But Thursday night was an occasion of pity so direct and inescapable that it left little to the understanding that wasn't mere afterthought — and pity not only for the observed, the performers, but for us who had come to observe them and reassure ourselves that we were not implicated. One might as readily persuade oneself one was not implicated in one's children! For this was it: these *were* children, miserable children trying desperately to manage, asking desperately to be taken out of it all; there was nothing one could imagine except to bundle them home and feed them warm milk, promise them they need no longer call for mama and papa. I kept asking myself, where had I had just such an experience before, and later it came to me: I had

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gone to see O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and the play had echoed with just such a child's cry for help; at intermission time all the mothers in the audience were so tormented and anxious that they rushed in a body to phone home: was the baby really all right, was he really well and warm in his bed; one couldn't get near the telephone booths. A dozen years ago, when Ginsberg had been a student and I had taxed Lionel with the duty to forbid him to misbehave, he had answered me that he wasn't the boy's father, and of course he was right. Neither was Mark Van Doren the boy's father; a teacher is not a father to his students and he must never try to be. Besides, Ginsberg had a father of his own who couldn't be replaced at will: he was in the audience the other night. One of the things Ginsberg read was part of a long poem to his mother who, he told us, had died three years ago, and as he read it, he choked and cried; but no one in the audience tittered or showed embarrassment at this public display of emotion, and I doubt whether anyone thought, "See, he has existence: he can cry, he can feel." Nor did anyone seem very curious when he went on to explain, later in the evening, that the reason he had cried was because his father was in the theater. I have no way of knowing what Ginsberg's father felt the other night about his son being up there on the stage at Columbia (it rather obsesses me), but I should guess he was proud; it's what I'd conclude from his expression at the end of the performance when Ginsberg beat through the admirers who surrounded him, to get to his father as quickly as he could: surely that's nice for a father. And I should suppose a father was bound to be pleased that his son was reading his poems in a university auditorium: it would mean the boy's success, and this would be better than a vulgarity, it would necessarily include the chairman's critical gravity and the fact, however bizarre, that T. S. Eliot had been the last poet in this place before him. In a sense, Orlovsky and Corso were more orphans than Ginsberg the other night, but this was not necessarily because they were without fathers of their own in the audience; I should think it would go back much farther than this, to whatever it was that made them look so much more armored, less openly eager for approval; although they were essentially as innocent and childlike as Ginsberg, they couldn't begin to match his appeal; it was on Ginsberg that one's eye rested, it was to the sweetness in his face and to his sweet smile that one responded;

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it was to him that one gave one's pity and for him one felt one's own fullest terror. Clearly, I am no judge of his poem, "Lion in the Room," which he announced was dedicated to Lionel Trilling; I heard it through too much sympathy, and also self-consciousness. The poem was addressed as well as dedicated to Lionel; it was about a lion in the room with the poet, a lion who was hungry but refused to eat him; I heard it as a passionate love-poem, I really can't say whether it was a good or bad poem, but I was much moved by it, in some part unaccountably. It was also a decent poem, it now strikes me; I mean, there were no obscenities in it as there had been in much of the poetry the "beats" read. Here was something else that was remarkable about the other evening: most of the audience was very young, and Ginsberg must have realized this because when he read the poem about his mother and came to the place where he referred to the YPSLs of her girlhood, he interposed his only textual exegesis of the evening: in an aside he explained, "Young People's Socialist League" — he was very earnest about wanting his poetry to be understood. And it wasn't only his gentility that distinguished Ginsberg's father from the rest of the audience; as far as I could see, he was the only man in the hall who looked old enough to be the father of a grown son; the audience was crazily young, there were virtually no faculty present, I suppose they didn't want to give this much sanction to the "beats." For this young audience the obscenities read from the stage seemed to have no force whatsoever; there was not even the shock of silence, and when Ginsberg forgot himself in the question period and said that something or other was bull-shit, I think he was more upset than his listeners; I can't imagine anything more detached and scientific outside a psychoanalyst's office, or perhaps a nursery school, than this young audience at Columbia. Of Corso, in particular, one had the sense that he mouthed the bad word only with considerable personal difficulty: this hurts me more than it hurts you.

Obviously, the whole performance had been carefully devised as to who would read first and what, then who next, and just how much an audience could take without becoming bored and overcritical: it would be my opinion we could have taken a bit more before the question period which must have been an anti-climax for anyone who had come, not as a tourist, but as a fellow-traveller. I've

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already reported how Ginsberg dealt with the philosophy question. There remains, of the question period, only to report his views on verse forms.

I don't remember how the question was put to Ginsberg — but I'm sure it was put neutrally: no one was inclined to embarrass the guests — which led him into a discussion of prosody; perhaps it was the question about what Ginsberg as a poet had learned at Columbia; but anyway, here, at last, Ginsberg had a real classroom subject: he could be a teacher who wed outrageousness to authority in the time-honored way of the young and lively, no-pedant-he performer of the classroom, and suddenly Ginsberg heard himself announcing that no one at Columbia knew anything about prosody; the English department was stuck in the nineteenth century, sensible of no meter other than the old iambic pentameter, whereas the thing about him and his friends was their concern with a poetic line which moved in the rhythm of ordinary speech; they were poetic innovators, carrying things forward the logical next step from William Carlos Williams. And now all at once the thing about Ginsberg and his friends was not their social protest and existentialism, their whackiness and beat-upness: suddenly it had become their energy of poetic impulse that earned them their right to be heard in the university, their studious devotion to their art: Ginsberg was seeing to that. Orlovsky had made his contribution to the evening; he had read his two whacky uproarious poems, the entire canon of his work, and had won his acclaim. Corso had similarly given his best, and been approved. The question period, the period of instruction, belonged to Ginsberg alone, and his friends might be slightly puzzled by the turn the evening had taken, the decorousness of which they suddenly found themselves a part — Corso, for instance, began to look like a chastened small boy who was still determined, though his heart was no longer in it, to bully his way through against all these damned grown-ups — but they had no choice except to permit their companion his deviation into high-mindedness. (Rightist opportunism?) Thus did one measure, finally, the full tug of something close to respectability in Ginsberg's life, by this division in the ranks; and thus, too, was the soundness of Dupee's reminder, that there is always something to learn from hearing a poet read his poems aloud, borne in on one. For the fact was that Ginsberg, reading his verse, had naturally given it the iambic beat: after

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all, it is the traditional beat of English poetry where it deals with serious subjects as Ginsberg's poems so often do. A poet, one thought — and it was a poignant thought because it came so immediately and humanly rather than as an abstraction — may choose to walk whatever zany path in his life as a man; but when it comes to mourning and mothers and such, he will be drawn into the line of tradition; at least in this far he has a hard time avoiding respectability.

The evening was over, we were dismissed to return to our homes. A crowd formed around Ginsberg; he extricated himself and came to his father a few rows ahead of us. I resisted the temptation to overhear their greeting. In some part of me I wanted to speak to Ginsberg, tell him I had liked the poem he had written to my husband, but I didn't do it: I couldn't be sure that Ginsberg wouldn't take my meaning wrong; after all, his social behavior is not fantasy. Outside, it had blown up a bit — or was it just the chill of unreality against which we hurried to find shelter?

There was a meeting going on at home of the pleasant professional sort which, like the comfortable living-room in which it usually takes place, at a certain point in a successful modern literary career confirms the writer in his sense of disciplined achievement and well-earned reward. I had found myself hurrying as if I were needed, but there was really no reason for my haste; my entrance was an interruption, even a disturbance of the attractive scene. Auden, alone of the eight men in the room not dressed in a proper suit but wearing his battered old brown leather jacket, was first to inquire about my experience. I told him I had been moved; he answered that he was ashamed of me. I said, "It's different when it's a sociological phenomenon and when it's human beings," and he of course knew and accepted what I said. Yet as I prepared to get out of the room so that the men could sit down again with their drinks, I felt there was something more I had to add — it was not enough to leave the "beats" only as human beings — and so I said, "Allen Ginsberg read a love-poem to you, Lionel. I liked it very much." It was a strange thing to say in the circumstances, perhaps even a little foolish. But I'm sure that Ginsberg's old teacher knew what I was saying, and why I was impelled to say it.

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George Simmel

THE ADVENTURE

Each part of our conduct and experience bears a twofold meaning. It revolves about its own center, contains as much breadth and depth, joy and suffering as the immediate experiencing gives it; and at the same time it is a segment of a life-course—not only a circumscribed entity but also a component of an organism. Both aspects, in various configurations, characterize every occurrence in life. Events which may be widely divergent in their bearing on life as a whole may nonetheless be quite similar to one another; or they may be incommensurate in their intrinsic meaning but so similar in respect to the roles they play in our total existence as to be interchangeable. . . .

We ascribe to an adventure a beginning and an end much sharper than those to be discovered in the other forms of our experience. The adventure is freed of the entanglements and concatenations characteristic of those forms and is given a meaning in and of itself. Of our ordinary experiences, we declare that one of them is over when, or because, another starts; they reciprocally determine each other's limits, and so become a means whereby the contextual unity of life is structured or expressed. The adventure, however, according to its intrinsic meaning, is independent of the "before" and "after"; its boundaries are defined regardless of them. We speak of adventure precisely when continuity with life is thus disregarded on principle—or rather when there is not even any need to disregard it, because we know from the beginning that we have to do with something alien, untouchable, out of the ordinary. The adventure

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lacks that reciprocal interpenetration with adjacent parts of life which constitutes life-as-a-whole. It is like an island in life determining its beginning and end according to its own formative powers and not—like the part of a continent—also according to those of adjacent territories. This factor of decisive boundedness, lifting an adventure out of the regular course of a human destiny, is not mechanical but organic: just as the organism determines its spatial shape not simply by adjusting to obstacles confining it from right and left but by the propelling force of a life forming from inside out, so does an adventure not end because something else begins; instead, its temporal form, its radical being-ended, is the precise expression of its inner sense.

Here, above all, is the basis of the profound affinity between the adventurer and the artist, and also, perhaps, of the artist's attraction to adventure. For the essence of a work of art is, after all, that it cuts out a piece of the endlessly continuous sequences of perceived experience, detaching it from all connections with one side or the other, giving it a self-sufficient form as though defined and held together by an inner core. A part of existence, interwoven with the uninterruptedness of that existence, yet nevertheless felt as a whole, as an integrated unit—this is the form common to both the work of art and the adventure. Indeed, it is an attribute of this form to make us feel that in both the work of art and the adventure the whole of life is somehow comprehended and consummated—and this irrespective of the particular theme either of them may have. Moreover, we feel this precisely because the work of art exists entirely beyond life as a reality; the adventure entirely beyond life as an uninterrupted course intelligibly connecting every element with its neighbors. It is because the work of art and the adventure stand over against life (even though in very different senses of the phrase) that both are analogous to the totality of life itself, even as this totality presents itself in the brief summary and crowdedness of a dream-experience.

For this reason, the adventurer is also the extreme example of the a-historical individual, of the man who lives in the present. On the one hand, he is not determined by any past (and this marks the contrast between him and the aged, of which more later); nor, on the other hand, does the future exist for him. An extraordinarily

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characteristic proof of this is that Casanova (as may be seen from his memoirs), in the course of his erotic-adventurous life, every so often seriously intended to marry a woman with whom he was at the time in love. In the light of his temperament and conduct of life, we can imagine nothing more impossible, internally and externally. Casanova not only had excellent knowledge of men but also rare knowledge of himself. Although he must have said to himself that he would not be able to endure marriage even for two weeks and that the most miserable consequences would follow such a step, his perspective on the future was wholly obliterated in the rapture of the moment. (Saying this, I mean to put the emphasis on the moment rather than on the rapture.) Because he was entirely dominated by the feeling of the present, he wanted to enter into a future relationship which was impossible precisely because his temperament was oriented to the present.

In contrast to those aspects of life which are related only peripherally—by mere fate—the adventure is defined by its capacity to have necessity and meaning in spite of its being isolated and accidental. Something becomes an adventure only by virtue of two conditions: that it itself is a specific organization of some significant meaning with a beginning and an end; and that, despite its accidental nature, its extra-territoriality with respect to the continuity of life, it nevertheless connects with the character and identity of the bearer of that life—that it does so in the widest sense, transcending, by a mysterious necessity, life's more narrowly rational aspects. . . .

The great forms in which we shape the substance of life are the syntheses, antagonisms, or compromises between chance and necessity. Adventure is such a form. When the professional adventurer makes a system of life out of his life's lack of system, when out of his inner necessity he seeks the naked, external accidents and builds them into that necessity, he only, so to speak, makes macroscopically visible that which is the essential form of every "adventure," even that of the non-adventurous person. For by adventure we always mean a third something, neither the sheer, abrupt event whose meaning—a mere given —simply remains outside us nor the consistent sequence of life in which every element supplements every other toward an inclusively integrated meaning. The adventure is no mere hodgepodge of these two. Rather it is that incomparable experience which can be inter-

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preted only as a particular form in which the internally necessary encompasses the accidental and external.

Occasionally, however, this whole relationship is comprehended in a still more profound inner configuration. No matter how much the adventure seems to rest on a differentiation within life, life as a whole may be perceived as an adventure. For this, one need neither be an adventurer nor undergo many adventures. To have such a remarkable attitude toward life, one must sense above its totality a higher unity, a super-life, as it were, whose relation to life parallels the relation of the immediate life-totality itself to those particular experiences which we call adventures.

Perhaps we belong to a metaphysical order, perhaps our soul lives a transcendent existence, such that our earthly, conscious life is only an isolated fragment as compared to the unnamable context of an existence running its course in it. The myth of the transmigration of souls may be a halting attempt to express such a segmental character of every individual life. Whoever senses through all actual life a secret, timeless existence of the soul, which is connected with the realities of life only as from a distance, will perceive life in its given and limited wholeness as an adventure when compared to that transcendent and self-consistent fate. Certain religious moods seem to bring about such a perception. When our earthly career strikes us as a mere preliminary phase in the fulfillment of eternal destinies, when we have no home but merely a temporary asylum on earth, this is obviously only a particular variant of the general feeling that life as a whole is an adventure. It merely expresses the running together, in life, of the symptoms of adventure. It stands outside that proper meaning and steady course of existence to which it is yet tied by a fate and a secret symbolism. A fragmentary incident, it is yet, like a work of art, enclosed by a beginning and an end. Like a dream, it gathers all passions into itself and yet, again like a dream, is destined to be forgotten; like gaming, it contrasts with seriousness, yet like the *va banque* of the gambler, it involves the alternative between the highest gain and destruction.

Thus the adventure is a particular form in which fundamental categories of life are synthesized. Another synthesis it achieves is that between the categories of activity and passivity, between what we

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conquer and what is given to us. To be sure, their synthesis in the form of adventure makes their contrast perceptible to an extreme degree. In the adventure, on the one hand, we forcibly pull the world into ourselves. This becomes clear when we compare the adventure with the manner in which we wrest gifts from the world through labor. Labor, so to speak, has an organic relation to the world. In a conscious fashion it develops the world's forces and materials toward their culmination in the human purpose, whereas in adventure we have a non-organic relation to the world. Adventure has the gesture of the conqueror, the quick seizure of opportunity, regardless of whether the portion we carve out is in harmony with us, the world, or the relation between us and the world. On the other hand, in the adventure we abandon ourselves to the world with fewer defenses and reserves than in any other relation; for other relations are connected with the general run of our worldly life by more bridges designed to defend us against shocks and dangers. In the adventure, the interweaving of activity and passivity which characterizes our life tightens these elements into a coexistence of conquest, which owes everything only to its own strength and presence of mind, and complete self-abandonment to the powers and accidents of the world, which can delight us, but in the same breath can also destroy us. Surely, it is among adventure's most wonderful and enticing charms that the unity toward which at every moment, by the very process of living, we bring together our activity and our passivity—the unity which even in a certain sense *is* life itself—accentuates its disparate elements most sharply, and precisely in *this* way makes itself the more deeply felt, as if they were only the two aspects of one and the same, mysteriously seamless life.

If the adventure, furthermore, strikes us as combining the elements of certainty and uncertainty in life, this is more than the view of the same fundamental relationship from a different angle. The certainty with which—justifiably or in error—we know the outcome gives our activity one of its distinct qualities. If, on the contrary, we are uncertain whether we will arrive at the point for which we have set out, if we know our ignorance of the outcome, then this means not only reduced certainty but a practical conduct of an inward and outward uniqueness. The adventurer, in a word, treats the incalculable element in life in the way we ordinarily treat only what we

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think is by definition calculable. (For this reason, the philosopher is the adventurer of the spirit. He makes the hopeless, but not therefore meaningless, attempt to form into conceptual knowledge an attitude of the soul, its mood toward itself, the world, God. He treats this insoluble problem as if it were soluble.) When the outcome of our activity is made doubtful by the intermingling of unrecognizable elements of fate, we usually limit our commitment of force, hold open lines of retreat, and take each step only as if testing the ground.

In the adventure, we proceed in the directly opposite fashion: it is just on the hovering chance, on fate, on the more-or-less that we risk all, burn our bridges, and step out into the fog, as if the road would lead us on, no matter what. This is the typical fatalism of the adventurer. The obscurities of fate are certainly no more transparent to him than to others; but he proceeds as if they were. The characteristic daring with which he continually leaves the solidities of life underpins itself, as it were, for its own justification with a feeling of security and "it-must-succeed," which normally belongs only to the transparent character of calculable events. This is only a subjective aspect of the fatalist conviction that we certainly cannot escape a fate which we do not know: the adventurer nevertheless believes that, so far as he himself is concerned, he is certain of this unknown and unknowable element in his life. For this reason, to the sober person adventurous conduct often seems insanity; for, in order to make sense, it appears to presuppose that the unknowable is known. The prince of Ligne said of Casanova, "He believes in nothing, except in what is least believable." Evidently, such belief is based on that perverse or at least "adventurous" relation between the certain and the uncertain, whose correlate, obviously, is the skepticism of the adventurer—that he "believes in nothing": to him whom the unlikely is likely, the likely easily becomes unlikely. The adventurer relies to some extent on his own strength, but above all, on his own luck; more properly, on a peculiarly undifferentiated unity of the two. Strength, of which he is certain, and luck, of which he is uncertain, subjectively combine into a sense of certainty.

It is the nature of genius to possess an immediate relation to these secret unities which in experience and rational analysis fall apart into completely separate phenomena. The adventurer of genius lives, as if by mystic instinct, at the point where the course of the

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world and the individual fate have, so to speak, not yet been differentiated from one another. For this reason, he is said to have a "touch of genius." The "sleepwalking certainty" with which the adventurer leads his life becomes comprehensible in terms of that peculiar constellation whereby he considers that which is uncertain and incalculable to be the premises of his conduct, while others consider only the calculable. Unshakeable even when it is shown to be denied by the facts of the case, this certainty proves how deeply that constellation is rooted in the life-conditions of adventurous natures.

The adventure is a form of life an undetermined number of experiences may acquire. Nevertheless, our definitions make it understandable that one of them, more than all others, tends to appear in this form: the erotic—so that our linguistic custom hardly lets us understand by "adventure" anything but an erotic one. The love affair, even if short-lived, is by no means always an adventure. The peculiar psychic qualities at whose meeting-point the adventure is found must be added to this quantitative matter. The tendency of these qualities to enter such a conjuncture will become apparent step by step.

A love affair contains in clear association the two elements which the form of the adventure characteristically conjoins: conquering force and unextortable concession, winning by one's own abilities and dependence on the luck which something incalculable outside ourselves bestows on us. A degree of balance between these forces, gained by virtue of his sense of their sharp differentiation, can, perhaps, be found only in the man. Perhaps for this reason, it is of compelling significance that, as a rule, a love affair is an "adventure" only for men; for women it usually falls into other categories. In novels of love, the activity of woman is typically permeated by the passivity which either nature or history has imparted to her character; on the other hand, her acceptance of happiness is at the same time a concession and a gift.

The two poles of conquest and grace (which manifest themselves in many variations) stand closer together in woman than in man. In man, they are, as a matter of fact, much more decisively separated. For this reason, in man their coincidence in the erotic experience stamps it quite unambiguously as an adventure. Man plays

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the courting, attacking, often violently grasping role: this fact makes one easily overlook the element of fate, the dependence on something which cannot be predetermined or compelled contained in every erotic experience. This refers not only to dependence on the partner's concession but to something deeper still. To be sure, every "love returned" is a gift which cannot be "earned," not even by any measure of love—because demand and compensation are irrelevant to love; it belongs in principle in a category altogether different from a squaring of accounts—a point which suggests one of its analogies to the more profound religious relation. But over and above that which we receive from another as a free gift, there still lies in every happiness of love—like a profound, impersonal bearer of those personal elements—a favor of fate. We receive happiness not only from the other: the fact that we do receive it from him is a blessing of destiny, which is incalculable. In the proudest, most self-assured event in this sphere lies something which we must accept with humility. When the force owing its success to itself and giving the conquest of love the note of victory and triumph is combined with the note of favor by fate, then the constellation of the adventure is pre-formed, as it were.

The relation connecting the erotic content with the more general form of life as adventure is rooted in deeper ground. The adventure is the exclave of life, the "torn-off" whose beginning and end have no connection with the somehow unified stream of existence. And yet, as if hurdling this stream, it connects with the most recondite instincts and some ultimate intention of life as a whole—and this distinguishes it from the merely accidental episode, from that which only externally "happens" to us. Now when a love affair is of short duration, it lives in precisely such a mixture of the merely tangential and yet central. It may give our life only a momentary splendor, like the ray shed in an inside room by a light flitting by outside. Still, it satisfies a need, or is, in fact, only possible by virtue of a need which —whether considered as physical, psychic, or metaphysical—exists timelessly, as it were, in the foundation or center of our being.

The fact that love harbors the possibility of this double relation is reflected by the twofold temporal aspect of the erotic. It displays two standards of time: the momentarily climactic, abruptly subsiding passion; and the idea of something which cannot pass, an idea

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in which the mystical destination of two souls for one another and for a higher unity finds a temporal expression. This duality might be compared with the double existence of intellectual content. While emerging only in the fleetingness of the psychic process, in the forever moving focus of consciousness, its logical meaning possesses timeless validity, an ideal significance which is completely independent of the instant of consciousness in which it becomes real for us. The phenomenon of adventure is such that its abrupt climax places its end into the perspective of its beginning. However, its connection with the center of life is such that it is to be distinguished from all merely accidental happenings. Thus "mortal danger" lies in its very style, so to speak. This phenomenon, therefore, is a form which by its time-symbolism seems to be predetermined to receive the erotic content. . . .

In youth, the accent falls on the process of life, on its rhythm and its antinomies; in old age, on life's substance, compared to which experience more and more appears relatively incidental. This contrast between youth and age, which makes adventure the prerogative of youth, may be expressed as the contrast between the romantic and the historical spirit of life. Life in its immediacy—hence also in the individuality of its form at any one moment, here and now—counts for the romantic attitude. Youth feels the full strength of the current of life most of all in the pointedness of an experience torn out of the normal run of things yet connected with the heart of life. Age, on the other hand—if, as such, it has a characteristic, valuable, and coherent attitude—carries with it a historical mood. This mood may be broadened into a world-view or limited to the immediately personal past; at any rate, in its objectivity and retrospective reflectiveness it is devoted to contemplating a substance of life out of which immediacy has disappeared. All history as depiction in the narrower, scientific sense originates in such a survival of substance beyond the present inexpressible process that can only be experienced. The connections this process has established are gone, and must now, in retrospect, and with a view to constructing an ideal image, be re-established by completely different means.

With this shift of accent, all the dynamic premise of the adventure disappears. Its atmosphere, as suggested before, is absolute pre-

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sentness—the sudden rearing of the life-process to a point where both past and future are irrelevant. Thus the adventure gathers life within itself with an intensity compared with which the event in its factuality often becomes of relative indifference. Just as the game itself—not the winning of money—is the decisive motive for the true gambler; just as for him, what is important is the violence of feeling alternating between joy and despair, the almost graspable nearness of the demonic powers that decide between both—so the fascination of the adventure is again and again not the substance it offers but rather the adventurous form of experiencing it, the intensity and excitement with which it lets us feel life in just this instance. This is what connects youth and adventure. What is called the subjectivity of youth is just this: the material of life in its substantive significance is not as important to youth as is the process carrying it, life itself. Old age is "objective"; it shapes a new structure out of the substance left behind in a peculiar sort of timelessness by the life which has slipped by. The new structure is that of contemplativeness, impartial judgment, freedom from that unrest which marks life as present. It is all this that makes adventure alien to old age and an old adventurer an obnoxious or tasteless phenomenon. It would not be difficult to develop the whole essence of adventure from the fact that it is the form of life which is in principle inappropriate to old age.

Notwithstanding the fact that so much of life is hostile to adventure, from the most general point of view adventure appears admixed with all practical human existence. It seems to be an ubiquitous element. But it frequently occurs in the finest distribution, invisible to the naked eye, as it were, and concealed by other elements. This is true quite aside from that notion which, reaching down into the metaphysics of life, considers our existence on earth as a unitary adventure. Viewed purely from a concrete and psychological standpoint, every single experience contains a modicum of the characteristics which, beyond a certain point, bring it to the "threshold" of adventure. Here the most essential and profound of these characteristics is the singling out of the experience from the total context of life. In point of fact, the meaning of no single part of life is exhausted by its belonging in that context. On the contrary, even when a part is most closely interwoven with the whole, when it really appears to be completely absorbed by onflowing life, like an unaccented

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word in the course of a sentence—even then, when we listen more closely, we can recognize the intrinsic value of that segment of existence. With a significance centered in itself, it sets itself *over against* that total development to which, nevertheless, if looked at from another angle, it inextricably belongs.

Both the richness and the perplexity of life flow incessantly from this dual value of its content. Seen from the center of the personality, every single experience is at once something necessary, emerging from the unity of the ego's history, and something accidental, foreign to that unity, insurmountably walled off, and colored by a very deep-lying incomprehensibility, as if it stood somewhere in the void and gravitated toward nothing. Thus a shadow of what in its intensification and distinctness constitutes the adventure really hovers over every experience. Every experience, even as it is incorporated into the chain of life, is accompanied by a certain feeling of being enclosed between a beginning and an end—by a feeling of an almost unbearable pointedness of the single experience as such. This feeling may fade, but it lies latent in every experience and rises from it—often to our own astonishment. It is impossible to identify any minimal distance from the continuity of life short of which the feeling of adventurousness could not emerge—as impossible, to be sure, as to identify the maximal distance where it *must* emerge for everyone. But everything could not become an adventure if its elements did not in some measure reside in everything, if they did not belong among the vital factors by virtue of which a happening is transformed into experience. . . .

The substance of our life is constantly seized by interweaving forms which thus bring about its unity. Everywhere there is artistic forming, religious comprehending, the nuance of moral valuing, the interplay of subject and object. There is, perhaps, no point at which each of these activities fails to leave its impress. But they become the pure structures which language names only when rising out of that fragmentary and confused condition of the average life. Once the religious mood has created the structure which is the god, it is "religion"; once the aesthetic form has made its content something secondary, it thus gains a life of its own and becomes "art"; once moral duty is fulfilled simply because it is duty, no matter how

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changing the content of fulfillment that once determined the will, it becomes "morality."

It is no different with adventure. We are the adventurers of the earth; our life is crossed everywhere by the tensions which mark adventure. But only when these tensions have become so violent that they gain mastery over the material of their self-realization, does the "adventure" arise. For the adventure does not consist in a substance won or lost, enjoyed or endured: to all this we have access in other forms of life as well. Rather, it is the radical way in which it becomes perceptible as a life-tension, as the rubato of the life-process, independent of its materials and their differences—these tensions increasing until they tear life, beyond those materials, completely out of itself: this is what transforms mere experience into adventure. Certainly, it is only one segment of existence among others. Yet it belongs to those forms which, beyond the mere share they have in life and beyond all the accidental nature of their individual contents, have the mysterious power to make us feel for a moment the whole sum of life as their fulfillment and vehicle.

Translated from the German by David Kettler

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POEMS

REVENGE

The cart rocks in the hollow night,
  Cart crammed with somnambulist Turks,
The clouds follow in slow delight
  This crowd asleep, hands on their dirks.

The moon's horn scratches me awake . . .
  All these mustachio'd ones in my power!
From my story-book armory I take
  My bow and seven arrows, lower

The window, turn down the lights;
  Then, when the cart comes reeling into dawn,
For all my stolen girls, guitarless nights,
  I avenge myself on these uncles one by one.

Harold Rosenberg

RUMORS OF REAL ESTATE

He speaks of a white room showing
Barest at night, shadowed only
By the lamp under which his cat,
White as well, warms in a brightness
Of refusals. Of course there are
Imperfections, but until now
He has been able to shut them
Up or away, into darkness
Behind the blank of his white doors.

Naturally we all suspect
Some other sort of chamber where
He works his living out, warden

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Of an implicating space: not
Only purple with unexplained
Obscurities, but gathering
All time in images of dim
Insistences. A various
Room, and full of forms, reflections.

But the truth is down a long hall
And in another place. Here are
Cruel colors, terrible cold
And a burning quite as extreme.
On the changeable bed someone
Else is lying and lying quite
Miserably. Now, following
Trials of temperature, come
Tests on teeth, examination

Nail by broken nail, and nightly
Obligation to employ each
Bright instrument that hangs upon
Its hook. This is a right surround,
Binding blur to brutality—
The genuine decor. How pat
Our word *apartment* falls in here,
For this is the life he divides
From the others, a death apart.

Richard Howard

POEM

Deeply I have heard this canticle, mute,
sweeping, mulled in the ears of girls
partial to the rose flower and the standing
willow tree. In the garden, easterly
the rose and willow grew. Emerald the willow
dropped, and rubies bright the roses
broke, and witch-flame burst adazzle

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thumping from the earth, and this garden
suddenly became zoological with mirth.

Animals grew gentle in the light of the sun.
The timid lion burst his wood and peered
behind the rose. Puffin, hawk, and partridge flew
into the standing willow tree. A resting
salamander turned from green to black,
and a crane stretched, and I cried out,
for I heard deeply in the mines in me
some gold or silver weep because they were not
bird or rose or tree.
And when I heard
this sound, I reached and found a knife,
and in my heart I plunged that knife,
that gold and silver might have life,
that animals that could not speak
might break my throats and sing.

Ned O'Gorman

THE CUT VERSION

Time was when my Odysseus
Made light the space between our seas
And storms resolved between our knees.

I with no serpents in my hair
Lay tender with the rank and fair,
With daisy petals feigned despair.

And when of necessity we shipped,
For show he had some big slave whipped,
Then like a gull's breast the prow dipped.

When proud as his consort on the boat
I learned by listening his note,
Sometimes his fingers bruised my throat.

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With all the sea for drink and food
Would you believe we lived on blood,
That with the leagues his tongue grew rude?

Who doubts that my hair turned white with brine?
The table a-tilt, we sat to dine,
We had each other's blood like wine.

"Honor," he said, blessed with that art,
"Binds me to this wrecked vessel's heart.
I thought the gods planned another part."

Ruth Stone

PETEY PASSES

O, no more to turn the light cloud as we go;
No more explore the face of youth,
Smiling and frowning, into sun and breeze:
Boy, moving with slouched abandon over the winnowing dunes,
Shouting, tree-trunk-brown,
Beckoning and roistering at the charge and sparkle of the seas.

As each wave rushes from its famous origin, the wind,
Framing in splendid lace the spinning strand—
The forward-pouring waters are like love.

Hold the moment, crystalline; now he lies, brown limbs,
Baked in cleanliness and salt, hot from the sun's kissing;
Curled embryonic, his cheek against the singing sand,
Drowsing out the afternoon;

Or, on two seconds, wild awake, when girls' voices,
Wafted on the summerseason, play at his youth's strings, like music.
He turns sensually within,
And then, with faun's smile and sudden grace,
He's up-away
For those mysterious sessions of young discovering.

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But these are the dead things.
This was a summer-time, buried now like bones in some encrusted vessel,
Fathoms deep.

Remember. Remember. Remember.
No. Forget!

The crisp spring leaves are sprouting. They will never fall.
Now, night falls, a sleeping silver cloak held by the stars.
O God, the lost-gone loves still hurt us sometimes like a crown of thorns.

Hugh Brooke

THE NURSE'S TALE

I have to weep when I see it, the grown boy fretting
for a sire who dawdles among the isles,
and the seascape hollowed out by that boy's edged gaze
to contain one speck, one only, for years and years withheld.

And that speck, that curious man, has kept from home
till home is almost the forbidden place, till blood
and the tears of an old woman must run down
to satisfy the genius of place. Even then, what
can they exchange at last, father and son?
the driftwood stranger and the rooted boy
whose eyes have nothing now to ask the sea.

But all the time and everywhere
lies in ambush for the distracted eyeball
light: light on the ship racked up in port,
the chimney-stones, the scar whiter than smoke,
than her flanks, her hair, that true but aging bride.

Adrienne Rich

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Isaac Deutscher

PASTERNAK AND THE CALENDAR OF THE REVOLUTION

I

The most striking characteristic of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* is its archaism, the archaism of the idea and of the artistic style alike. The book has been received, in the West, as part of the recent Russian revulsion against Stalinism and as its most consummate literary expression. Yet, *Doctor Zhivago* is nothing less than that—it is utterly unrelated to the Russia of the 1950's and to the experiences, troubles, and heart-searchings of the present Soviet generation. It is a parable about a vanished generation. Pasternak, now approaching his seventieth year—his formative period fell in the last decade before the October revolution—might have written this book in 1921 or 1922. It is as if his mind had stopped at that time, after the traumatic shock of the revolution; and as if nearly all that his country has since gone through had remained a blank. His sensitivity has remained unaffected, almost untouched, by the great and grim, yet not unhopeful drama of Russia's last three decades. The actual story of *Doctor Zhivago* ends in 1922. Pasternak brings it artificially "up to date" in two brief and hurried postscripts, "Conclusion" and "Epilogue," the first covering thinly the years from 1922 to 1929, till Zhivago's death, and the second jumping straight into the 1950's. The postscripts have almost none of the better qualities of the work but show all its weaknesses and incongruities absurdly magnified.

Much of the climate and the local color of *Doctor Zhivago* and many of its ideas can indeed be found in the poems and prose of Andrey Belyi, Zinaida Gippius, Evgenii Zamyatin, Marietta Shaginian, and other writers of the 1920's, who were once polemically described as "internal émigrés." They were so called because they lived, worked (and published their works) under the Soviet regime, but in some measure shared the ideas and moods of the actual anti-Bolshevik émigrés. Some, like Gippius and Zamyatin, eventually went abroad and there voiced their opposition to the revolution without inhibition. Others adjusted them-

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selves, assumed the postures of "fellow-travellers," and eventually became Stalin's court poets—Shaginian, for instance, was a Stalin Prize Winner. It is with the voice of that original, authentic "internal émigré" that Pasternak has now spoken, equally unshaken in his hostility towards Bolshevism and his deep, physical and poetic, attachment to Russia. It is as if, in the course of nearly four decades, he had managed to preserve this his identity intact. His perception, his emotions, and his imagination have remained as if closed to the many deep changes that have transformed his country beyond recognition and to some of the storms that have raged over it in the meantime. This testifies to the organic strength of his character but also to an extraordinary rigidity and limitation of his sensitivity. *Doctor Zhivago* is indeed an act of resurrection. But risen from the dead, Pasternak speaks the language of the dead, not of the living.

II

Doctor Zhivago is a political novel *par excellence*; and so its appraisal must start with the analysis of its political message. The author puts the message into the mouth of his chief character, who is largely his own projection, and into the mouths of the other figures who all talk at great length about their attitude towards the revolution. They dwell on the revolution's failure, on its inability to solve any problems, on the violence it has done to the human personality, and on the disillusionment it has brought in its wake. The plot is designed to bear out this critique. Nearly all the characters are driven to misery, despair and death; and love and humanity are defeated and destroyed by the "politics of revolution." In the background there is Russia, shown as senselessly convulsed and tormented to no purpose, unless in mystical expiation of sin. Christianity remains the hope and refuge, a Christianity which need not be clearly defined but is recognizable in its humanitarian outlook, its humility, its acceptance of history, and its refusal to try and remake man's earthly destiny. It is from this quasi-fatalistic Christianity that finally springs Pasternak's ethereal note of reconciliation even with the revolution, the unexpectedly optimistic note on which the novel ends. It may be, the author suggests, that the great expiation has been accomplished and the deluge is over: its few survivors can already sense a "presage of freedom in the air" and a "silent music of happiness"; and they "feel a peaceful joy for this holy city" of Moscow.

A message of this kind is a matter of faith and hardly lends itself to rational discussion. Nor is it likely to be fruitful artistically. With nothing but these beliefs and convictions, Pasternak's characters are

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from the beginning outsiders to the revolution, lacking all point of contact with it, and psychologically static. The author evidently feels this and seeks to animate them, to take them "inside" the revolution, and invest them with something like dilemmas. He presents Doctor Zhivago as almost a revolutionary at first, or, at any rate, a man sympathetic to the revolution, who suffers disillusionment and disintegrates in despair. In the same way he tries to complicate other characters like Strelnikov, the Red commander, and Lara, Strelnikov's wife and Zhivago's mistress. In every case, however, he fails. He tried to square a circle. From Christian rejection of the October revolution it might be possible for a Russian writer to produce perhaps a new version of Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme,* but not a true, coherent, and convincing image of the revolution and of the human beings who have made it or experienced it.

How does Pasternak arrive at the rejection? Is his (and Zhivago's) profession of sympathy with the origins of the revolution mere pretense? Certainly not. He is the victim of a genuine and in a sense tragic confusion. He himself reveals this when he describes Zhivago's, that is his own, state of mind shortly before October, 1917: "Here too were his loyalty to the revolution and his admiration for it, the revolution in the sense in which it was accepted by the middle classes and in which it had been understood by the students, followers of Blok, in 1905." The revolution accepted by the middle classes in 1905, it should be recalled, had as its ideals either a Czardom reformed into a constitutional monarchy or, as an extreme, a Liberal-Radical bourgeois republic. That abortive bourgeois revolution was implicitly opposed to the proletarian revolution of 1917. Pasternak-Zhivago is unaware that his "admiration and loyalty" to the former must necessarily bring him in conflict with the latter.

The confusion goes even deeper: the Zhivago of 1917 is as if unaware that even this his "loyalty to the ideas of 1905" is by now only a fading memory. "This familiar circle," Pasternak goes on, "also contained the foretaste of new things. In it were those omens and promises which before the war, between 1912 and 1914, had appeared in Russian thought, art, and life, in the destiny of Russia as a whole and in his own, Zhivago's." The allusive reminiscence would convey to a Russian, if he could read it, far more than it can possibly convey to a Western reader. "Between 1912 and 1914" Russia's middle classes, the bourgeoisie, had definitely turned their backs on their own radicalism of 1905, had taken their distance from the revolutionary underground movement, and were seeking salvation exclusively in a liberalized Czardom. The mildly socialistic and radical intelligentsia, encouraged by a slight soft-

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ening of the autocracy, spoke of the "liquidation of the illusions and methods of 1905"; and the Bolsheviks were already virtually alone in upholding the tradition of revolutionary action—outside their ranks only Plekhanov and Trotsky, and their very few followers, did the same. This then is the climate of opinion which Pasternak-Zhivago recalls in 1917, reflecting that "it would be good to go back to that climate once the war was over, to see its renewal and continuation, just as it was good to be going home." Thus, even at this stage, on the eve of the October insurrection and well before his disillusionment had begun, Zhivago's "loyalty and admiration for the revolution" is nothing but a transfigured and glorified nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Russia.

Latent and unconscious at the beginning, this nostalgia comes into its own and bursts to the surface later. "I can still remember a time when we all accepted the peaceful outlook of the last century," says Lara to Zhivago. "It was taken for granted that you listened to reason, that it was right and natural to do what your conscience told you. . . ." she adds (as if Russia had not lived in serfdom for most of that golden age, "the last century," and in semi-serfdom for the rest of it!). "And then there was the jump from this calm, innocent, measured way of living to blood and tears, to mass insanity. . . . You must remember better than I do the beginning of disintegration, how everything began to break down all at once—trains and food supplies in towns, and the foundations of home life and conscious moral standards."

"Go on," Zhivago interjects. "I know what you will say next. What good sense you make of it all! It's a joy to listen to you."

Pasternak's recital of the broken pledges of October is thus based on a false premise: The October revolution had never promised to satisfy his nostalgia and to "go back to the climate" of 1912-1914, let alone to that of the nineteenth century. He rests his case on the fact that the October revolution was not a bourgeois revolution or rather that it did not content itself with a mildly reformed version of the *ancien régime*. Of all the charges that have ever been levelled against Bolshevism, this is surely the most archaic one. When it was voiced around 1921 it was still the echo of a fresh controversy. In 1958 it comes to us like a voice from the grave.

III

"*Comme* La Guerre et La Paix, *le* Docteur Jivago," writes Francois Mauriac, *"ne restitue pas seulement des destinées particulières, mais l'histoire politique qui naît d'elles et qui, à son tour, les infléchit et leur donne une signification."*

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Mauriac naturally finds himself in the warmest sympathy with Pasternak's Christianity. But has he also based his opinion on a consideration of *Doctor Zhivago's* merits as a novel? Even though Pasternak himself, through various imitative details of composition and style, evokes *War and Peace*, it is difficult to see how any novelist can make the comparison seriously. Tolstoy's huge canvas is alive and crowded with a magnificently full blooded, richly individualized yet organically integrated, social milieu. In *Doctor Zhivago* a mere fragment of a milieu comes only partly alive, and this only in the opening chapters—the milieu of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, Platonically "faithful to the ideas of 1905" but well adjusted in fact to the *ancien régime* and leading a smug existence on the fringes of the upper and middle bourgeoisie and of the Czarist bureaucracy. After 1917 this milieu disintegrates and disperses, as it was bound to do; and—as nothing takes its place—its *membra disjecta,* as individuals, are whirled furiously into a social vacuum, from which they hark back to their lost felicity. No *histoire politique* emerges therefore from their private destinies, certainly not any *histoire politique* of the Bolshevik epoch.

Tolstoy takes the characters of *War and Peace* straight into the center of the great events of their time. He throws them right onto the stream of history, which carries them until they are overwhelmed or come on top. Pasternak places his characters in the backwoods and backwaters. They do not participate in any single important event; nor do they even witness any such event. Yet, what would *War and Peace* have been without Austerlitz and Borodino, without the fire of Moscow, without the Czar's Court and Kutuzov's headquarters, and without the retreat of the Grande Armée, all reproduced by Tolstoy's epic genius? What significance would have had the *destinées particulières* of Pierre Bezukhov and André Bolkonsky without their deep and active involvement in these events? The drama of 1917-1921 was at least as great as that of 1812; and it is far more momentous in its consequences. Yet Pasternak never manages to give us a single glimpse of its main theme, of its central occurrences, and of its significant actors. It is not only that he lacks the gift of epic narration and has no eye for the historic scene. He runs away from history, just as all the time his chief characters flee from the scourge of revolution.

We barely hear in *Doctor Zhivago* a grotesquesly remote echo of the stormy prelude of 1905. Then, during the World War until September 1917, Zhivago serves as an army doctor in a God-forsaken Carpathian village and a Galician townlet on the Hungarian frontier, hundreds and

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hundreds of miles away from the centers of the revolutionary upheaval. He returns to Moscow almost on the eve of the October insurrection and stays there during the insurrection. What he sees, experiences, and has to say about it consists of a few flat and meaningless sentences which do not add up to half a page. Throughout the rising, which in Moscow lasted much longer and was much bloodier than in Petrograd, he stays in his rooms. His child has a cold, his friends come, talk about the fighting outside, get stuck at the Zhivagos' for three days, after which they go home at last. "Yuri had been glad of their presence during Sasha's illness and Tonya forgave them for adding to the general disorder. But they had felt obliged to repay the kindness of their hosts by entertaining them with ceaseless chatter; Yuri felt exhausted by it and was glad to see them go." This is all we hear or learn of the upheaval: not a single person appears that participates in it. On the next page we are told abruptly that Zhivago was "shaken and overwhelmed by the greatness of the moment and the thought of its significance for centuries to come." We must believe the author upon his word; we have seen no one "shaken and overwhelmed." Zhivago did not even look at the event, so full of "significance for centuries to come" through the window of his flat or even through the chinks of his shutters. The revolution had only added to the "general disorder" in his household and exposed him to the "ceaseless chatter" of his friends. What curious lack of artistic sense the author shows here, and what intellectual infantilism!

There follow a few thin and incoherent pages in which we are shown how the revolution adds further to the "general disorder" in the household. Then, Moscow succumbs to starvation, epidemics, cold; Zhivago himself falls ill with typhus and recovers. By now the author and his hero have began to brood over the breakdown of civilized life and the calamitous deterioration of human nature. "In the meantime the Zhivagos were tried to the limits of endurance. They had nothing and they were starving. Yuri went to see the party member he had once saved, the one who had been the victim of a robbery. This man helped him as far as he could, but the civil war was beginning and he was hardly ever in Moscow; besides, he regarded the privations people were suffering in those days as only natural, and himself went hungry, though he concealed it." And so the Zhivagos pack up and leave for the Urals, hoping to recoup there and to enjoy some quiet well-being on what used to be their family estate.

Thus we have left behind the famished, tense, and severe Moscow of the early months of civil war, without getting even as much as a hint

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of the issues agitating it: war and peace, Brest Litovsk, the German threat to Petrograd, the move of Lenin's government from Petrograd to Moscow, the attempts of the counter-revolution to rally, the hopes for the spread of revolution in Europe, the uprising of the Left Social Revolutionaries, the final dissolution of the old army, the emergence of the new one, not to speak of the distribution of land among the peasants, workers' control over industry, the beginnings of socialization, the attempt on Lenin's life, the first outbreaks of the Red terror, etc., all occurring during the months of Zhivago's stay in Moscow. We get no inkling of the severe pathos of these months, of the mass enthusiasms and the soaring hopes, without which the shocks to the hopes remain meaningless. We are hardly able to guess that Moscow is already being cut off by the Whites from food and fuel bases in the south: and so famine and chaos appear as the results of an apocalyptic breakdown of moral standards.

By coincidence I have read simultaneously with *Doctor Zhivago* the manuscript of memoirs written by an old worker who, himself an anarchist, took part in the Bolshevik uprising in Moscow. Without literary pretensions, very plainly, he describes the same period with which Pasternak deals; and he too is now bitterly disillusioned with the outcome of the revolution. But what a difference between the two pictures of the same city (even the same streets!) seen at the same time. Both writers describe the famine and the sufferings. But the old anarchist draws also unforgettable scenes of streets which, as far as he could see from a crossroads, were filled with Red workers, hastily arming themselves, and even with war cripples begging for arms; and then—the same streets changed into a battlefield; and he brings alive the inspired and tense heroism of Moscow's working class, an atmosphere of which Pasternak conveys not even a whiff. Again, it is as if Tolstoy had brought Pierre Bezukhov to burning Moscow only to let him bemoan the hunger and the ruins, without letting him (and us) feel how the great and tragic conflagration illumines Russia's past and present. To Tolstoy the fire of Moscow and the cruel deeds and sufferings of 1812 are no mere atrocities—if they had been, Tolstoy would not be himself, and *War and Peace* would not be what it is. To Pasternak the revolution is primarily an atrocity.

Zhivago's resentment swells in him during his long and weary journey to the Urals. He travels in an overcrowded goods train, packed with human misery. Here are some of Pasternak's best descriptive pages. The scenes and episodes are true to life—the literature of the 1920's is full of similar descriptions. Zhivago's chief preoccupation is still with his and his family's well-being, although he tries to "defend the revolution" in

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a brief and rather lifeless dialogue with a deported anti-Bolshevik politician. He is finally overcome by disgust with the new regime, and with his time at large, in the Urals, when his expectation of satiety and quietude on the old family estate is disappointed, when he is torn between loyalty to his wife and love for Lara; and when eventually the Red partisans trap him on a highway, abduct him to their forest camp, and force him to serve them as doctor.

The picture of the Forest Brotherhood is forcefully drawn. There is in it a sense of space, Siberian space, of the cruelty and mercy of nature and man, and of the primordial savagery of the fight. Still, we touch here only a remote periphery of the civil war, a forlorn and icy corner of Mother Russia. (Pasternak himself spent those years in the Urals, though not in any Forest Brotherhood.) The types or rather situations he depicts here are convincing, and at times (for instance the doings of the witch in the Forest Brotherhood) even fascinating; but they are only marginal. They represent the anarchic fringe of the Red Army which by now fights its battles against Kolchak, Denikin, Yudenich, and Wrangel—elsewhere, mostly far to the West, in European Russia. There the human element, the problems, and the situations were different from those encountered in this Forest Brotherhood, although the civil war was savage and cruel everywhere. The Forest Brotherhood, at any rate, forms, even in fiction, too slender a basis for any *histoire politique* of this period.

It is there, in the partisans' camp, that Zhivago's final "break" with the revolution occurs. Abducted from the highway, he explodes in anger over the violation of his rights as an individual, the insult to his human dignity, and the breakdown of all moral standards. After eighteen months in captivity, during which at moments he feels almost closer to the Whites than to the Reds, he manages to escape. If this were all, one could say that the story has its psychological and artistic logic and that the author has "taken it from life." But Pasternak does not content himself with this. Not relying on objective narrative and portrayal, he incessantly idealizes his hero, his own projection, and leaves us in no doubt that he shares Zhivago's thoughts and emotions and all his indignation. (Nearly all his characters do the same, because the author does not manage to set up any real contrast or counter-balance to Zhivago!) Politically and artistically Pasternak thus involves himself in a self-revealing inconsistency. Zhivago, we know, had, as doctor, spent several years in the Czarist army; and all those years he behaved extremely meekly, never making any fuss over his sacred rights as individual and his offended

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dignity. Implicitly, he thus acknowledges the right of the *ancien régime* to press him into service—he denies that right only to the Red partisans. Yet they do exactly what the old army had done: they make the doctor look after the wounded. Unlike the Czarist army, they had not sent him call-up papers by mail but had kidnapped him—they had not yet had the time to build up a military machine which would mobilize doctors and others in a "civilized" manner. Surely from the angle of Pasternak-Zhivago's morality this should have been an irrelevant detail: at any rate, it should not have made so great a moral difference to the idealistic and humanitarian doctor whose wounded soldiers he cure, those of the Czar, of the Whites or the Reds. Why then does he only now feel so deeply insulted in his human dignity?

The juxtaposition of these two situations in Zhivago's life is significant in other respects as well. Near the Carpathian front, that cemetery of the Czarist army, Zhivago had seen blood, suffering, death, and countless atrocities. Pasternak sparingly describes a few of these but he does not dwell on that side of Zhivago's early experience. He presents as an almost uninterrupted atrocity only that part of the story which begins with the revolution. Nostalgia for the *ancien régime* here too colors his entire vision, determines for him his horizon, and dictates even the composition of the novel.

Unintentionally, Pasternak portrays his hero, the sensitive poet and moralist, as the epitome of callousness and egotism—unintentionally, because otherwise he could hardly have so insistently identified himself with Zhivago and lavished on him all the lachrymose love with which the novel overflows. The egotism is physical as well as intellectual. Zhivago is the descendant not of Pierre Bezukhov but of Oblomov, Goncharov's character who, though not worthless, had spent all his life in bed, as symbol of the indolence and immobility of old Russia. Here is Oblomov in revolt against the inhumanity of a revolution that has dragged him out of bed. Goncharov, however, conceived Oblomov as a grand satyrical figure; Pasternak makes of him a martyr and the object of an apotheosis.

Willy-nilly one thinks of a fierce and ruthless, yet historically just passage in Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution,* written in 1923, which appears to anticipate Zhivago. In truth, however, Trotsky did not anticipate him; he merely summed up a certain type that belonged to that time:

When a certain Constitutional Democratic aesthete, having made a long journey in a stove-heated goods wagon, tells you, muttering between his teeth, how he, a most refined European, with a set of superb false

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teeth, the best in the world, and with a minute knowledge of Egyptian ballet techniques, was reduced by this boorish revolution to travelling with despicable lice-ridden bagmen,[1] then you feel rising up in your throat a physical nausea with his dentures, ballet techniques, and generally with all his "culture" pilfered from Europe's market stalls; and the conviction grows upon you that the very last louse of the most uncouth of our bagmen is more important in the mechanics of history and more, so to speak, necessary than this thoroughly "cultured" and in every respect sterile egotist."

We recognize at once the "Constitutional Democratic aesthete"—it was to him that the "omens and promises of 1912-1914" had been the most congenial—and we have some idea even of his long journey in a goods wagon, with despicable lice-ridden bagmen. True, his specialty now is not Egyptian ballet techniques but the old Slavonic Prayer Book; and his culture comes from native stores as well as from Europe's market stalls. Perhaps so many years after the revolution our throats at his sight are less susceptible than Trotsky's was to violent physical nausea. All the same we cannot help identifying the same sterile egotist in Zhivago the moralist and humanitarian.

IV

With the archaism of the idea goes the archaism of the artistic style. *Doctor Zhivago* is extremely old-fashioned by any standards of the contemporary novel; and the standards by which, being what it is, it has to be judged are those of the old-fashioned realistic novel. The texture of its prose is pre-Proust, nay, pre-Maupassant. It has nothing in it of the experimental modernity of Pilniak, Babel and other Russian writers of the 1920's. Obsolescence of style is not a fault in itself. The point is that Pasternak chooses deliberately his mode of expression which is the mode proper to the *laudator temporis acti.*

In his diary Pasternak-Zhivago thus expresses his artistic programme: "Progress in science follows the laws of repulsion—every step forward is made by reaction against the delusions and false theories prevailing at the time. . . . Forward steps in art are made by attraction, through the artist's admiration and desire to follow the example of the predecessors he admires most." Nothing is further from the truth. In art as well as in science progress is achieved by a combination of "repulsion" and "attraction" and the tension between these two forces. Every step forward, as Hegel knew, is a continuation of tradition and at the same time a reaction against tradition. The innovator transcends the heritage of

1. *Meshochniki,* those who travelled with their bags in search of food or trading food.

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the past by rejecting some of its elements and developing others. However, Zhivago's reflections have some relevance to Pasternak's literary conservatism.

This is Pasternak's first novel, written at the age of about 65, after he had been a poet all his life. His main formative influences had been the Russian Symbolist school, which flourished early in the century, then for a short time the pre-revolutionary Futurism, and finally, the "Formalism" of the early 1920's. These schools enriched the idiom and refined the techniques of Russian poetry, but often they also weakened its élan and narrowed its imaginative range. Within the Symbolist and the Formalist traditions Pasternak has achieved almost perfection. His virtuosity of form has made of him Russia's most eminent translator of Shakespeare and Goethe. As far as I can judge from his poems, of which some are not easily accessible and others have remained unpublished, virtuosity rather than vigorous, inventive, and creative mastery distinguishes Pasternak. Yet as a poet too he is curiously antiquated compared with Mayakovsky and Yessenin, his contemporaries.

What prompted him to write his first novel at so advanced an age was the feeling that his poetry, or poetry at large, could not express adequately the experience of his generation. There is a touch of greatness in this admission and in the poet's effort to transcend his limitations. However, for any writer whose gifts had, for nearly half a century, been attuned exclusively to lyrical poetry, it would, in any case, have been risky to try his hand at a realistic and political novel. Pasternak's poetic tradition has proved an insuperable obstacle to his literary metamorphosis. He has not been able to jump the gulf between lyrical symbolism and prose narrative.

This accounts for the incongruity between the various elements that make up *Doctor Zhivago*: on the one side lyrical passages, noble, richly imaginative, refined, and fastidiously polished; and on the other the core of the novel itself, flat, clumsy, labored, and embarrassingly crude. It is as if the book had been written by two hands: the virtuoso-poet of 65 and a beginning novelist of 16.

Scattered like jewels over the pages of *Doctor Zhivago* are Pasternak's exquisite descriptions of nature or rather of mood in nature which serve him as keys to the moods and destinies of his hero. The method, with a long tradition behind it, is familiar; but Pasternak excels at it. There is richness and delicacy in his images of forest, field, river, country road, sunrise and sunset, and of the season of the year. The realistically painted landscape is shot through with a mystical symbolism, which se-

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lects a bush torn by a storm or a frozen tree as omen or token. The writing on the wall is the writing on the face of nature itself. Even in these passages, which would by themselves make an impressive anthology of Pasternak's poetry in prose, his range is limited—he rarely succeeds, for instance, in the drawing of an urban scene; and not infrequently there is a note of affectation and preciosity in his manner of pressing on the reader the symbolical meanings "hidden" in landscape or mood. All the same, Pasternak the image-maker and word-polisher shows himself at his best.

Unfortunately, a novel aspiring to the large and realistic scale cannot be built around such lyrical fragments. The author's evident attempt to do so has only shown up the perplexing contrast between his sophisticated word-mastery and his ineptitude as a novelist. His plot is, from beginning to end, a jumble of absurd and assiduously concocted coincidences, such as would have discredited a novelist even in Stendhal's days. The *deus ex machina* jumps incessantly before our eyes. Without his help the author simply does not manage to establish any connection between the characters, to bring them together, to separate them, and to evolve and resolve their conflicts. He fails in this because he does not manage to develop and bring alive the characters themselves. Even Zhivago is little more than a blurred shadow. The psychological motivation of his behavior is incoherent. The author substitutes for it exalted lyrical and symbolic allusions; and he speaks for Zhivago and on his behalf instead of letting the personality speak for itself. "Everything in Yuri's mind was mixed up together and misplaced and everything was sharply his own—his views, his habits, and his inclinations. He was unusually impressionable and the freshness and novelty of his vision were remarkable." "The vigor and the originality of his poems made Yuri forgive himself what he regarded as the sin of their conception, for he believed that originality and vigor alone could give reality to a work of art. . . ." "Shyness and lack of simplicity [were] entirely alien to his nature." The superlatives which the author heaps on his hero and the subtle poetic aura by which he surrounds him cannot give reality or depth to the figure. Zhivago's attitudes towards his wife and mistress, and towards his many children born of three women, are strained or never assume verisimilitude: not for a single moment does the father come alive in him (and none of his children has any individuality). Not only the author sings his hero's praises—nearly all the characters do the same. Nearly all are in love with Yuri, adore him, approve his ideas, echo his deep reflections, and nod their heads at whatever he says.

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The other characters are altogether puppet-like or *papier mâché,* much though the author exerts himself to make them move of their own accord, or to make them look "unusual," enigmatic, or romantic. Even more than in the case of Zhivago, lyrical patches, naive and stilted dialogues, and affected superlatives have to stand for the portrayal of character and of actual relationships. This, for instance, is how the intimate concord between Lara and Zhivago is described:

Their low-voiced talk, however unimportant, was as full of meanings as the Dialogue of Plato.

Even more than by what they had in common, they were united by what separated them from the rest of the world. . . .

They loved each other greatly. Most people experience love, without noticing that there is anything remarkable about it. To them—and this made them unusual—the moments when passion visited their doomed human existence like a breath of timelessness were moments of revelation, or of ever greater understanding of life and of themselves.

In this *histoire politique* of the epoch the author makes no attempt to draw a single Bolshevik figure—the makers of the revolution are an alien and inaccessible world to him. He underlines that his revolutionaries are not party men. They are primitively picaresque types or wholly incredible eccentrics, like Klintsov-Pogorevshikh, the deaf-mute instigator of rebellions in the Czarist army, Liberius, the chieftain of the Forest Brotherhood, and the most important of them Strelnikov, Lara's husband. Of Strelnikov we learn that he "had an unusual power [how Pasternak loves this adjective!] of clear and logical reasoning, and he was endowed with great moral purity and sense of justice; he was ardent and honorable." From disappointment in family life—apparently his only motive—he plunges into revolution, becomes a legendary Red commander, the scourge of the Whites and of the people at large; but eventually falls foul of the Bolsheviks—we do not know why and how but presumably because of his "moral purity and sense of justice"; and he commits suicide. A few workers appear fleetingly in pale episodes, and are either half-wits or servile post-seekers. We do not see the Whites at all, apart from one remote and evanescent apparition. One could not even guess from this grand cross-section of the epoch who were the men who made the revolution, who were those who fought the civil war on either side, and why and how they lost or won. Artistically as well as politically the epoch-making upheaval remains a vacuum.

V

Yet despite this void, and the unctuous moralizing and all the falsettos, there is in *Doctor Zhivago* a note of genuine conviction. The

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suggestive indictment of the revolution must make its impression on the reader who is unfamiliar with the background of the years 1917-1922 but is vaguely aware of the horrors of the Stalin era. Confusing the calendar of the revolution, Pasternak projects those horrors back into the early and earliest phases of the Bolshevik rule. The anachronism runs through the entire novel. In the years 1918-1921 Zhivago and Lara are already revolted by the tyranny of the monolithic regime which in fact was not formed until a decade later:

They were both equally repelled by what was tragically typical of modern man, his shrill text-book admirations, his forced enthusiasms, and the deadly dullness conscientiously preached and practised by countless workers in the fields of art and science in order that genius should remain extremely rare.

It was then that falsehood came into our Russian land [Zhivago and Lara agree]. The great misfortune, the root of all the evil to come was the loss of faith in the value of personal opinions. People imagined that it was out of date to follow their own moral sense, that they must sing the same tune in chorus, and live by other peoples' notions, the notions which are being crammed down everybody's throat.

I do not know [says Zhivago] of any teaching more self-centred and farther from the facts than Marxism. Ordinarily, people are anxious to test their theories, to learn from experience, but those who wield power are so anxious to establish the myth of their own infallibility that they turn their back on truth as squarely as they can. Politics mean nothing to me. I do not like people who are indifferent to the truth.

Zhivago-Pasternak goes on in this vein without any substantial contradiction from any other character. Yet, the "forced enthusiasms," the deadly uniformity in art and science, the "singing of the same tune in chorus," and the degradation of Marxism to an infallible Church—all this fits the fully-fledged Stalin era but not the years in which these words are spoken. Those were years of *Sturm und Drang,* of bold intellectual and artistic experimentation in Russia, and of almost permanent public controversy within the Bolshevik camp. Does Pasternak-Zhivago confuse the calendar of the revolution or is he confused by it? Whatever the truth, only this confusion enables him to make his case. He could not have actually argued in 1921 the way he does. Yet readers familiar only with the atmosphere of the latter day Stalinism are all too likely to believe that he could. It may be objected that the author need not concern himself with historical chronology, and that he has the right to compress or "telescope" various periods and so reveal the evil embedded in the thing itself. Where then are the limits of the compression? And does not historical and artistic truth come out mangled? Pasternak, at any rate, establishes most carefully, almost pedantically, the chronol-

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ogy of the events which form the background to Zhivago's fortunes; and so he should be expected to demonstrate the "spirit of the time," on which he dwells so much, in accordance with the time.

To be sure, the deadly uniformity in art and science, the disregard and contempt of personal opinion, the infallibility of the ruler, and so many other features of the Stalin era evolved from germs which had been present in the early phase of the revolution; but they evolved in continuous and inexorable conflict with that phase. No great artist could possibly have missed, as Pasternak has, the colossal tragedy inherent in this chain of cause and effect and in the tension between the early and the late phases of the revolution and of Bolshevism. What Pasternak does is not merely to blur the contours of the time—he pulverizes all the real aspects of the revolution and dissolves them into a bloody and repulsive fog. Art and history alike, however, will reestablish the contours and make their distinction between the revolution's creative and its irrationally destructive acts, no matter how entangled these may have been, just as, in the case of the French Revolution, posterity, with the exception of extreme reactionaries, has drawn its distinction between the storming of the Bastille, the proclamation of the Rights of Man, and the rise of the new and modern, be it only bourgeois, France, on the one hand, and the nightmares of revolution and the gods that were athirst, on the other.

Pasternak hardly ever alludes (even in his "Conclusion" and "Epilogue") to the great purges of the 1930's. Yet he constantly uses their black hue for his picture of the earlier period—this indeed is the only respect in which he draws for his writing on any significant social experience of the last three decades. His silence about the great holocaust of the 1930's is not accidental. This was tragedy *within* the revolution; and as such it does not concern the outsider, let alone the internal émigré. What is striking here is the contrast between Pasternak and writers like Kaverin, Galina Nikolaeva, Zorin and others, whose post-Stalinist novels and plays (unknown in the West and some of them virtually suppressed in the Soviet Union) have centered precisely on the tragedy within the revolution, the tragedy which they also see from within. In Pasternak's pages the transposed horrors of the Stalin era exist mainly as the source of his own moral self-confidence, the self-confidence he needs for his critique of the revolution at large. We have said that he might have written *Doctor Zhivago* in the early 1920's; but he could not have written it then with his present self-confidence. At that time, with the "heroic" phase of the revolution still fresh, the internal émigré labored under the sense of his moral defeat. After all the experiences of the Stalin era, he

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now feels that he has morally recovered; and he flaunts his self-righteousness. This is a spurious recovery, however; and it is helped along by a *suggestio falsi.*

Pasternak traces back Zhivago's ideas and his Christianity to Alexander Blok. In Blok's *Twelve,* Christ walked at the head of armed workmen, tramps, and prostitutes, leading them, in the blood red dawn of October, towards a greater future. There was a certain artistic and even historic authenticity in this daring symbol. In it were merged the primitive Christianity and the elemental revolutionary élan of the Russia of the muzhiks who, chanting Prayer Book psalms, burned the mansions of the aristocracy. The Christ who blessed that Russia was also the Christ of primitive Christianity, the hope of the enslaved and the oppressed, St. Matthew's Son of Man, who would sooner let the camel go through the eye of a needle than the rich man enter into the Kingdom of God. Pasternak's Christ turns his back on the rough mob he had led in October and parts company with them. He is the pre-revolutionary self-sufficient Russian intellectual, "refined," futile, and full of grudge and resentment at the abomination of a proletarian revolution.

VI

Pasternak has been hailed in the West for his moral courage; and much is written about his poetry as a "challenge to tyranny" and his stubbornly non-conformist attitude throughout the Stalin era. Let us try and disentangle facts from fiction. It is true that Pasternak has never been among Stalin's versifying sycophants. He has never bowed to the official cult and observance; and he has never surrendered his literary integrity to powerful taskmasters. This alone would have been enough to earn him respect and to make of his writing a startling phenomenon. His poetry stands out sharply against the grey background of the official literature of the last thirty years. Against that lifeless and unendurably monotonous background even the old-fashioned quality of his lyricism could appear and has appeared as a thrilling innovation. One may therefore speak of him as of a great and even heroic poet in that semi-ironical sense in which the Bible speaks of Noah as a just man "in his generation," a generation of vice. Pasternak stands indeed head and shoulders above the poetasters of the Stalin era.

However, his courage has been of a peculiar kind—the courage of passive resistance. His poetry has been his flight from tyranny, not his challenge to it. To this he has owed his survival, in a generation in which the greatest poets, Mayakovsky and Yessenin, committed suicide, and

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most of the best writers and artists, Babel, Pilniak, Mandelstam, Kluyev, Voronsky, Meyerhold, and Eisenstein, to mention only these, were deported, imprisoned and driven to death. Stalin did not allow many of Pasternak's poems to be published; but he spared their author and, by the despot's benevolent whim, even surrounded him with care, protecting his safety and well-being. The poet did nothing to gain these favors; but Stalin knew that he had little to fear from his poetry. He sensed a threat to himself not in the archaic message of the man who harked back to pre-revolutionary times, but in the work of those writers and artists who, each in his own way, expressed the ethos, the *Sturm und Drang,* and the non-conformity of the early years of the revolution—there Stalin sensed the genuine challenge to his infallibility. With those writers and their message Pasternak has been in implicit conflict; and it would be unjust to their memory to hail him as the most heroic and authentic spokesman of his generation. Moreover, their message, even though it, too, belongs to its time and can hardly meet the needs of our day, has certainly far more relevance to the experience and the aspirations of the new Russia than have the ideas of *Doctor Zhivago.*

When all this has been said, one cannot react otherwise than with indignation and disgust to the suppression of *Doctor Zhivago* in the Soviet Union, and to the spectacle of Pasternak's condemnation. There exists no justification and no excuse for the ban on his book and the outcry against it, or for the pressure exercised on Pasternak, to make him resign the Nobel award, the threat of his expulsion from the country, and the continuing witch-hunt. The Writers' Union of Moscow and its official instigators or accomplices have achieved nothing except that they have given proof of their own obtuseness and stupidity.

What are Pasternak's censors afraid of? His Christianity? But the Soviet State Publishers print in millions of copies the works of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, every page of which breathes a Christianity far more authentic than Pasternak's. His nostalgia for the *ancien régime*? But who, apart from a few survivors of the old intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, people of Pasternak's age, can share that nostalgia in the Soviet Union today? And even if younger people were to experience it vicariously—what possibly could the Soviet Union fear from that? It cannot and it will not go back to the past, anyhow. The work of the revolution can no longer be undone or reversed: the huge, formidable, and ever growing structure of the new Soviet society will hardly stop growing. Can perhaps a poet's eye, turned inwards and backwards, and wandering over the wastes of his memory, cast an evil spell? Zhivago still represents a power-

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ful force, frequently felt and heard, in Poland, Hungary, Eastern Germany, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe; but in the Soviet Union he is the survivor of a lost tribe. In the fifth decade of the revolution it is time to view him with detachment and tolerance and to let him mourn his dead.

Pasternak's censors, too, are evidently confusing the calendar of the revolution. They have broken away from the Stalin era, or have been wrenched out of it; but somehow they still imagine themselves to be living in it. They are still superstitiously seized by old and habitual fears and resort to the customary charms and exorcisms. Above all, they distrust their own, modern and educated, society which is growing mightily above their heads as well as Pasternak's.

Time does not stand still, however. Ten years ago *l'affaire Pasternak* would not have been possible. Pasternak would not have dared to write this novel, to offer it for publication in Russia, and to have it published abroad. If he had done this, Stalin's frown would have sent him to a concentration camp or to death. Despite all the present witch-hunting in Moscow, however, Pasternak's personal freedom and well-being have so far remained undisturbed; let us hope that they will remain so to the end. He might have gone abroad and in the West enjoyed fame, wealth, and honor; but he has refused to "choose freedom" in that way. Perhaps he does indeed hear that "silent music of happiness," of which he says, in the last sentences of *Doctor Zhivago,* that it spreads over his country, even if he does not quite understand that music. Slowly yet rapidly, painfully yet hopefully, the Soviet Union has moved into a new epoch, in which the mass of its people is seizing anew the sense of socialism. And perhaps in ten years time another *affaire Pasternak* will also be impossible, because by then the fears and the superstitions of Stalinism will have long been forgotten.

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Irving Howe

FREEDOM AND THE ASHCAN OF HISTORY

Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it—Santayana

If one's first response to Mr. Deutscher's essay is a rush of feeling which I shall keep myself from describing, one's second response is a kind of gratitude: *good, let it all come out into the open.* For Mr. Deutscher is an authoritative spokesman for a political-intellectual tendency of growing importance; only babes will suppose his attack on Pasternak to involve serious literary issues: it is neither more nor less than a political act.

As long as Soviet Russia remains a powerful state, and no matter how often it displays its contempt for freedom, it will exert an attraction for Western intellectuals, particularly those "authoritarians of the left" who have replaced the dimmed fraternal sentiments of their youth with a hard-headed valuation of industrial power. Among the French this takes the form of a rationalist dementia cut off, on principle, from the domain of fact; among the British, a gentlemanly tolerance for "those chaps"; among Germans, a commitment to the asserted *logos* of History which moral experience seems unable to deflect; and among Americans a managerial *cameraderie* resting upon a joint esteem for the gestures of power, the wonders of technology, and bureaucratic planning (the fetishism of the plan having, in our time, replaced the fetishism of commodities).

These converging sentiments make up together what might be called a *new conciliationism* in regard to the Communist dictatorship. Among intellectuals a major symptom of this is the desire to add to the undisputed necessity for political coexistence an attitude that might be called moral coexistence. And since *Doctor Zhivago* has already provided a decisive test for many people—for men in power like Khrushchev, for men out of power like the "revisionist" writers of Poland who recently acclaimed the book—so, through what might be called the

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dialectic of irritation, it has provoked Mr. Deutscher into an unusual bluntness of statement. His major charge against *Doctor Zhivago*—that its devotion to individual and liberal values is "archaic," that it "speaks the language of the dead" (though, considering their tragic history, might it not be appropriate that Russia's greatest living poet speak their language?)—this can be understood only if one realizes that Mr. Deutscher writes as a theorist who believes that the irrevocable progress of History is floating the Communist state. His assault upon Pasternak derives from a fundamental identification with the "essence," though not necessarily with each manifestation, of that progress.

At the end of his essay, in a burst of rapture—it depends, rather amusingly, upon his simplification of a phrase from Pasternak—Mr. Deutscher speaks of the "music of the future," the music of socialism no less, of which he hears the anticipatory chords in Khrushchev's Russia. I write from another standpoint. The "music" I hear from Russia is that of a party-state still in basic opposition to the values of democracy and socialism: a party-state that systematically silences those who would speak for freedom. The people of Russia remains a prisoner: the leash has been lengthened, the rations are improved, but the prisoner is not free. And I do not believe that the growing wealth and strength of this jail-society assures a gradual slide into freedom, though it *may* offer new opportunities for those who want freedom to struggle against the party monopoly of power.

This much understood, we may look at one or two of Mr. Deutscher's ventures into criticism, not because they are significant in themselves but because they lead back to the area in which his views are significant: politics.

II

Mr. Deutscher describes *Doctor Zhivago* as a "political novel *par execellence*" and then, quite as if he were reviewing a full-scale political-social history of Communist Russia, bemoans its failure to present directly the tumultuous events of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary years. The novel does not even show us, he complains, a single *bona fide* Bolshevik. But if by a "political novel" (especially "*par excellence!*") we mean one that focusses primarily upon a course of political happenings or upon a clash of political ideologies, then *Doctor Zhivago*, despite its occasional passages about Marxism, might better be described as an "anti-political" novel, one that deals with the effort of a man to survive in his own being at a time when the imperious demand of politics is total.

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Mr. Deutscher's critical strategy lends itself to unexpected uses: he could, for example, dismiss *The Charterhouse of Parma,* since its hero Fabrice merely glances at the central event of his time, the battle of Waterloo, and then lives a dream-like and non-political existence, even though the political events of the Napoleonic era, as Stendhal makes clear, decisively shape his life. (For that matter, Mr. Deutscher's complaints about the "coincidences" in *Zhivago* would also permit him, like recent generations of students, to dismiss Thomas Hardy's great novels in which the sense of a fate beyond human control is similarly projected through the use of "coincidence.")

The novel Pasternak happens to have written is quite different from the one Mr. Deutscher thinks he has or should have written. Pasternak largely takes for granted the sweep of historical events and the likelihood that his Russian readers will be familiar with them. (Given their "education," it is perhaps the one thing he can take for granted.) What he wishes to impress upon his readers is the value of an independent consciousness, sometimes heroic, more often passive and helpless, yet clinging to its own terms of existence. But this, judging from his article, does not seem to interest Mr. Deutscher very much.

A good many of the terrible events, however, are touched upon in the novel, either by implication or through brief presentiments—and to my mind, touched upon with great force and objectivity. One thinks of the moments when Zhivago is at the front, a witness to the disintegration of the Czarist army; or later in Moscow, discovering that in times of stress the snatched pleasure of duck and vodka, because it is not shared with other men, is no pleasure at all (is that perhaps an incident justifying the resort to Trotsky's vulgar passage about aesthetes?); or still later during the marvelously-portrayed journey to the Urals, when Zhivago argues in behalf of the revolution against one of its "premature" critics, shares with ease and affection the trials of the ordinary people who are his companions on the train, and experiences, in his inner self, the meaning of a vast historical uprooting.

Here is Zhivago as a witness to the revolution—and one wonders whether it is this passage that prompted Mr. Deutscher to his delicate comparison with the "Constitutional Democrat aesthete":

He realized he was a pygmy before the monstrous machine of the future; he was anxious about this future, and loved it and was secretly proud of it, and as though for the last time, as if in farewell, he avidly looked at the streets and the clouds and the people walking in the streets, the great Russian city struggling through misfortune—and was ready to sacrifice himself for the general good, and could do nothing.

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When Mr. Deutscher charges Zhivago, as a representative of his class and/or generation, with yearning for a period (1912-1914) when Russia's middle classes "had definitely turned their back on their own radicalism of 1905," he neglects to add that those were also years in which, perhaps mistakenly, many Russian intellectuals felt some hopes for a *liberal* development. And when he charges Pasternak with basing his "recital of the broken pledges of October . . . on a false premise," he is being less than just: for while it is true that the Bolshevik revolution did not promise to return to the climate of 1912-1914, it is also true that in its first year or so it gave the intellectuals reason to hope that it would honor at least some of the freedoms Pasternak clearly had in mind when referring to the pre-revolutionary years. In any case, if the point of *Doctor Zhivago* were really so preposterous as a piping for the Czarist past, the dictatorship would surely not have reacted to it with so sustained and intense a fury: for what damage could it then have done, what impact could it have had? No, when the students of Moscow hailed Pasternak a few years ago, chanting a request that he read his translation of Shakespeare's 66th sonnet (*"And art made tongue-tied by authority"*), they saw him not as a relic of "the dead" but as a spokesman and symbol of the freedom they desired.

It is true that Zhivago's political consciousness, never more than a fragment of that complex human consciousness toward which he strives, can at no point satisfy the strict requirements of a Leninist. One of the main themes of the novel is that the Bolshevik regime, as it rapidly became monolithic and bureaucratized, gave people like Zhivago no margin for survival. As Nicola Chiaromonte has written in a moving essay (*Dissent,* Winter 1959): "What Pasternak has done is to show what is left of characters under conditions in which the very identity of the individual is threatened, and tends to be reduced to an inconsistent sequel of occasions and acts."

That is why the passage Mr. Deutscher singles out as "naive and stilted"—the passage in which Pasternak compares the conversation of Zhivago and Lara with the dialogues of Plato—acquires in context a noble and tragic character. Loyalty to the text would require readers to be told that this passage occurs in a quick transitional section which summarizes what has been and will again be shown in dramatic fullness: that Zhivago has been ill, that he has now been reunited with Lara, that they find it possible, while living on the edge of the precipice they know awaits them, to rediscover something of the value of human existence through sharing in the spirit of sacrifice and love. But to the

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accomplice of History, all this seems "naive," a residual sentiment of "a survivor of a lost tribe." Yes, the human tribe.

Chiaromonte's point—central for an understanding of the novel—also helps explain why Mr. Deutscher's comparison between *War and Peace* and *Doctor Zhivago* betrays both literary and political insensitivity. I happen to think, unlike other critics, that Pasternak did begin his novel with an intention of composing a story of Tolstoyan breadth: hence, its least successful section, the opening series of dry vignettes. But it must have become clear to him that, if he were to write honestly, he could not compose this kind of novel about the Russia of the last decades. Pasternak began, perhaps, by desiring to capture something of the Tolstoyan freedom and spontaneity, its joy as a token of man's gratitude for existence; his characters reach for it eagerly, pathetically; but the Russia he comes to describe, whether of the War Communism years or the Stalin and post-Stalin periods, is too grey, too grim in its inhumane monolithism to permit a prolonged release of the Tolstoyan ethos. To have pretended otherwise would have been to acquiesce in a characteristic falsification of Soviet fiction.

Yet after about the first 100 pages—far from repeating, as Mr. Deutscher supposes, the usual business of the old-fashioned social novel—Pasternak radically shifts his focus and begins to compose a quite different kind of novel. The very "substance" of his imagined world, in respect to which all the other characters are observed and validated, becomes Zhivago's sense of consciousness: his sense of consciousness as it is the last refuge of freedom. Through his doomed yet exemplary struggle to maintain the life of contemplation, through his proud insistence upon the autonomy of his inner "organic" being, Zhivago comes to represent—and even in those moments of lassitude and demoralization that so offend Mr. Deutscher's spartan sensibilities—all that which in human life must remain impervious to the manipulation of the party-state and its ideology.

It is for this reason that *Doctor Zhivago* is not merely a remarkable novel in its own right but a testament for the silent and suppressed: all those who, no matter how they might reject Zhivago's ideas, share with him the yearning for the right to free reflection. It is for this reason that Zhivago, feeble broken creature that he finally becomes, still represents the "permanent revolution" of man against the total state.

Whether Pasternak confuses "the calendar of the Russian revolution" would therefore seem a secondary matter. (Other great Russian novels, Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* and Turgenev's *Virgin Soil,* have

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also been accused, perhaps with greater justice, of violating the "calendar" of their day: a fact that in no way diminishes their value as literature or "evidence.") In any case, is this confusion quite so shocking as Mr. Deutscher claims? Outright terrorism Pasternak shows only at the end of the novel, as in the chilling paragraph which records that Lara "died somewhere, forgotten as a nameless number on a list that afterwards got mislaid, in one of the innumerable mixed or women's concentration camps in the north." (A passage reflecting, perhaps, Pasternak's "archaism?") What Pasternak portrays in the early 'twenties is the cruelty of the Civil war ("White and Red atrocities rivalled each other in savagery"), the gathering fanaticism of the triumphant Communists, the agonies of personal survival. I submit that his novel shows a greater faithfulness to the essential history of our time as it has become the crucifixion of freedom and consciousness, than all of Mr. Deutscher's dialectical turnings.

III

About the literary merits of *Doctor Zhivago* there can of course be legitimate disagreement. But one would expect an intellectual to feel only the deepest sense of comradeship with Pasternak as a man, to be stirred to emotions of fraternity by the sight of this aging poet as he suffered in loneliness the assaults of the party-state. (Or should we congratulate Khrushchev for not having arranged his liquidation?) And here, despite Mr. Deutscher's careful statement of opposition to the witch-hunt and the banning, I find his article lamentable. No one, not even the reader who disagrees with every word I have written, could say that Mr. Deutscher's moral-political impulse is a warm solidarity with the artist absorbing the blows of the state.

Mr. Deutscher chastizes "the censors" for their "obtuseness and stupidity." But surely it is more than a matter of "censors," and something far more serious than "obtuseness." These "censors" did not act on their own, apart from the cues of Khrushchev and Mikoyan; the whole apparatus of the party-state—including that agent of Russia's "not unhopeful drama," the Konsomol leader who called Pasternak a pig—threw itself into the vendetta against the writer. Mr. Deutscher, faithful to his theories, must however present the matter as if it were the result of the "obtuseness" of officials out of step with History, bureaucrats who, having perhaps mislaid the calendar of the revolution, don't understand their own true interests, which Mr. Deutscher tries so patiently to explain. (One wonders, incidentally, whether the suppression of the

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Hungarian revolution was also due to mislaying the calendar.)[1]

What Mr. Deutscher does not face up to is the political significance of the Pasternak case. Pasternak, writing almost as if he too, at the end of the book, accepted Mr. Deutscher's optimistic prognosis, offered a novel that forced the regime to decide how far the "thaw" could go. The party-state answered by brutally suppressing the book. Does this fact support Mr. Deutscher's theory about the expected gradual "democratization" of Russian Communism, or does it indicate that, with less violent methods, the regime stands ready to suppress fundamental disagreement and criticism, and insists upon maintaining its ideological monopoly?

Mr. Deutscher seems almost to plead with "the censors": let the senile old poet mumble his memories of the dead, he can do you no harm, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were also Christians. But the "censors" may realize that Pasternak's version of "Christianity," because it speaks of human freedom, *is* a danger to them; and they may feel that they can manage their dictatorship without the help of Western *Besserwissers.* Or perhaps there is truth in Herbert Marcuse's remarks about the Soviet attitude toward art:

> . . . it is precisely the catastrophic element inherent in the conflict between man's essence and his existence that has been the center toward which art has gravitated. . . . The artistic images have preserved the determinate negation of the established reality—ultimate freedom. When Soviet esthetics attacks the principle of the "insurmountable antagonism between essence and existence" . . . it thereby attacks the principle of art itself.

May it not be then, that from *their* point of view, the "censors" are not so obtuse? Mr. Deutscher gives involuntary support to this possibility when he writes that, while a relic in Russia, "Zhivago still represents a powerful force" in Poland and Hungary. But the Russian "censors" know how short is the distance from Warsaw or Budapest to Moscow. And in any case, what is the logic of Mr. Deutscher's state-

1. But one need not wonder for long. In *Russia in Transition* Mr. Deutscher writes: "It may be said that in October-November [1956], the people of Hungary in a heroic frenzy tried unwittingly to put the clock back, while Moscow sought once again to wind up with the bayonet, or rather the tank, the broken clock of the Hungarian Communist revolution. It is difficult to say who it was who acted the more tragic, and the more futile or hopeless role."

   Calendars, clocks—the image changes, the politics remains. Like Yuri Zhivago, the people of Hungary in their quest for freedom are seen as representing the past, while the Russian tanks, however brutally, push forward the clock. No wonder that, again, Mr. Deutscher feels no overwhelming impulse to identify himself with those who fight against the tanks.

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ment? If Zhivago stands for nostalgia for the *ancien régime,* and if in eastern Europe he is a threat to "the revolution," does it not follow that there may be some ground for suppressing the book, not in Russia, but in Poland and Hungary? Mr. Deutscher will of course protest; but let him look to his own words before protesting too quickly.

IV

The heart of the matter is Zhivago's "archaism"—a charge that reminds one, unhappily, of Trotsky's arrogant habit of dismissing political opponents to the "ashcan of history." If one believes that in their essence the Communist states embody the necessary and/or desirable future, then perhaps Zhivago is "archaic." But if one believes that the central issue of our time is freedom and that all the "old" nineteenth-century problems have acquired a new value since the rise of the total state, then Zhivago speaks for the best of the past as it relates to the future. That Pasternak is a kind of "old-fashioned" and even conservative nineteenth-century liberal I do not doubt; but if socialism is to prove something better than a cruel caricature of its own pretensions, the task of modern politics becomes that of finding a new and more humane mode of realization for the values of nineteenth-century liberalism. It becomes necessary, that is, to find a link between the values of an older generation that is represented by men like Pasternak and a younger generation that is represented by men like the Polish writer Marek Hlasko, who remains a rebel but has broken from Communism because, as he writes, life under Communism is "a moral atrophy."

If you have read only Mr. Deutscher and not the novel itself, you might suppose Pasternak has nothing to say about such matters. Quite the contrary! It is a main concern of his book. Does, for example, the following passage betray an aesthete's "archaism" or a profound insight into characteristic vices of totalitarianism?

> Microscopic forms of cardiac hemorrhages have become very frequent in recent years. . . . It's a typical modern disease. I think its causes are of a moral order. The great majority of us are required to live a life of constant, systematic duplicity. Your health is bound to be affected if, day after day, you say the opposite of what you feel. . . . I found it painful to listen to you, Innokentii, when you told us how you were reeducated and became mature in jail. It was like listening to a horse describing how it broke itself in.

Or the following passage: is this a "voice from the dead" or a humane intelligence portraying the disease of party fanaticism?

> Dudorov's pious platitudes were in the spirit of the times. But it was

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precisely their conformism, their transparent sanctimoniousness, that exasperated Zhivago. Men who were not free, he thought, always idealize their bondage. So it was in the Middle Ages, and later the Jesuits exploited this same human trait. Zhivago could not bear the political mysticism of the Soviet intelligentsia. . . .

Or is the following a "parable of a vanished generation" or a voice anticipating the democratic aspirations of tomorrow?

To conceal the failure [of forced collectivization] people had to be cured, by every means of terrorism, of the habit of thinking and judging for themselves, and forced to see what did not exist . . . This accounts for the unexampled cruelty of the Yezhov period, the promulgation of a constitution that was never meant to be applied, and the introduction of elections that violated the very principle of free choice.

If this be "archaism," let every man who believes in freedom declare himself archaic.

V

Finally, putting aside Mr. Deutscher's unfortunate venture into literary criticism, let me try to summarize what seems to me the political meaning of our disagreements. Since I have very little space left, what follows will necessarily be overly condensed, schematic and lacking in qualification.

When a modern state exerts total control over the economy, political power becomes indistinguishable from social and economic power. If, as in Russia, the Party has a monopoly of political power, it also tends to have a monopoly of social and economic power. Democracy then becomes not a "luxury" which may be gradually expected to make its appearance, parcelled out decades after the totalitarian party has seized power. It is a *sine qua non* for any socialist or "progressive" development, and its absence signifies that the people have been rendered helpless.

Hegel wrote that *"The lower classes have been left more or less unorganized. And yet it is of the utmost importance that they should be organized, for only in this way can they become powerful. Without organization, they are nothing but a heap, an aggregate of atoms."* This brilliant observation applies exactly to Soviet Russia: the one major industrial country in the world where the working class has never so much as known the experience of a legal strike, an elementary right won in the bourgeois world over a century ago.

The political outlook I have called "left authoritarianism" remains committed, with all sorts of qualifications, to what it regards as an "es-

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sential" value—the *idea*—of the Communist world. Usually this value is found in nationalized property, which is seen as an ultimate guarantor of progress. Where Marx spoke of *"the categorical imperative that all conditions must be revolutionized in which man is a debased, an abandoned, contemptible being"* (how archaic this sounds!), the left authoritarians prefer to speak of the tempo of Russian industrialization or the necessary unfolding of the iron laws of History. Where socialists have traditionally declared that the possibility of a humane society rests upon the capacity of men to act autonomously and freely, ceasing to be objects and becoming subjects of history, the left authoritarians put their faith in economic processes or historical abstractions acting beyond—indeed, usually against—the desires of living men.

Those who accept, wholly or in part, the left authoritarian outlook expect an orderly development, a moderate "democratization," from within the Communist world and *within the limits of its ethos and power*. It follows that, while sincerely deploring the Russian intervention, they deprecate the Hungarian revolution; that they regard the passion of a Zhivago for individual freedom as a sign of archaism. I think, however, that a commitment to democracy and/or socialism involves a belief in the need for a fundamental change of social relations in the Communist world, which means first and foremost, the collapse or destruction of the monopoly of power of the ruling party, such as occurred two years ago in Hungary and Poland. These contrasting perspectives involve far more than differences in theory or estimate: they involve the very heart of political and moral values.

What Pasternak's views about the future of the Communist world may be, I do not know. But I believe that if and when freedom is reestablished in Russia, the people will regard him as one who, quite apart from political opinions, was faithful to the truth of their agony. And for that they will honor him.

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W. D. Snodgrass

FINDING A POEM*

In the Introduction to his *Collected Poems,* Robert Frost writes:

> It is but a trick poem and no poem at all if the best
> of it was thought of first and saved for the last. . . .
> No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader.

If this is true, revision may be one of the most important creative acts; it is certainly the creative act most easily studied.

I find that my own revisions fall into two categories. First, many appear to be purely stylistic. I was raised, poetically, in a highly intellectual atmosphere; William Empson was my first love. When one of my poems goes bad, I almost always have to go back and write it longer—develop, openly and extensively, ideas which I have been trying to imply intensively. This does not involve changing the poem's denotational sense, only its way of speaking. That does not mean that such changes are unimportant; it is at least possible to argue that a poem's style—that quality of voice which suggests qualities of mind—that this *is* its basic meaning.

Second, however, and more immediately significant, are those revisions which I will call conceptual. Sometimes a poem *does* surprise you by taking itself out of your well-meaning hands and deciding for itself what it will say. Sometimes you find that your poem has taken you into an area where words have resonance, where the words and images echo through many areas of your thinking. You have approached something basic to that pattern of ideas and emotions and feelings which *is* your mind; you find out something of what *your* meaning is. Nine

* This paper was originally delivered to a symposium on poetry at the University of Rochester. In this symposium, three young poets—Hyam Plutzik, Richard Gollin and W.D. Snodgrass—each presented a paper on the problems involved in revising one or more of his own poems.

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chances out of ten, this is something far different from the well-intended pseudo-beliefs which you offer yourself and your world everyday.

In this paper, I want to record one of the few lucky times this has happened to me. To do this, I shall have to become for the moment, a sort of earnest graduate student of my own poem. I shall have to present a first and a last version of it and try to unfold the changes or recognitions inside my mind which caused the differences between these versions. And since the mind never lives divorced from its objects, since no perception endures apart from the thing perceived, I shall have to investigate the objects and events of my personal life which then concerned me, and which led me to define what I then believed.

Several years ago, I wanted to write a poem for my daughter, Cynthia, from whom I was separated by divorce from my first wife. I had already written four or five poems for my daughter, one for each season over a period of about a year and a half. This new poem, I thought, would be for the Spring of 1954. I had collected a set of reminiscences and images about Easter, rebirth and repetition, eggs, birds and flight. I had not analyzed these images; I only felt that they "belonged together" in one poem. What such a poem might mean, I had no inkling. When no further ideas came to me, I decided to set about trying to write the poem anyway, to see if a pattern would emerge in the actual writing.

For some time I had been fascinated by the purely syllabic metric I had seen in remarkable poems by Marianne Moore, W. H. Auden, Kenneth Rexroth, and by my friend Donald Justice. I chose this metric for my poem, hoping it might open some new rhythmic possibilities to me, but hoping also that it would let me drop into occasional stretches of flat prose which might balance the rather "poetical" quality of the images I had collected. The stanza I hit on had a syllable count which ran 5, 7, 4, 7, 6, 8, 12, 9 and rhymes which ran a, b, a, b, c, c, d, d. (You may notice that stanza 4 is metrically faulty in several places.) This, then, is the first version which I produced when I tried to versify my cluster of images:

HEART'S NEEDLE, vi.

Easter comes around
again; the river rising,
the rigid ground
melting. When you come you bring
an egg dyed lavender.
We shout along these banks to hear

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our voices returning from the hills to meet us.
We need the landscape to repeat us.

Here where you were born
we watched the sundown swallow
dive, drive and turn,
we skimmed stones or might follow
the killdeer from her nest;
we walked where, in their day of rest
lovers lay always on the riverbanks. You still
live nearby, on the opposite hill.

After the windstorm
of July Fourth, all summer
through the light, warm
haze we heard great chain saws chirr
like iron locusts, watched crews
of squirrelmen climbing to hack loose
limbs twisted, torn in the shattering wind, cut free
the wrenched branches that could sap the tree.

By the park's birdrun
we once found, loose, outside,
a buff pigeon,
proud, brown-spatted. When I tried
to take her, she flapped so
fiercely in my grip, I let her go.
The keeper came and we helped snarl her in a net.
You bring things I'd as leave forget.

I mind how the red-
winged blackbird flapped her wild wings,
dived at my head,
scolding how her frail nest swings
there, where the tall reeds sway.
I recollect here your first May—
rain and the river rising, the killdeers flying
all night over the mudflats crying.

I showed this poem, for criticism, to a number of my friends at the University of Iowa. Most of them liked it in a lukewarmish way;

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one said that it sounded a little like an imitation of my earlier poems about my daughter. And, when I came back to it, I had to admit that I still didn't know what it was about. I could see that the image of hacking the limbs off the trees was related to my separation from my daughter (I had previously described this as an animal gnawing off one of its limbs to get out of a trap); the pigeon fluttering out of my hands was related both to my letting her go in the separation and also to the way she sometimes ran away to make me chase her. The blackbird in the last stanza seemed to be my first wife "protecting" her nest; the killdeers crying over their flooded nests implied some sense of grief over the breaking up of the home. These things all made sense and were all memories which the child's return might cause to be reborn in me. But this did not seem enough. No adequate pattern had emerged. I wasn't sorry to have written the poem, but I couldn't say that I thought much had happened.

Besides, what was the Fourth of July (stanza 3) doing in my Easter poem? Of course there *had* been a terrible windstorm that night in Iowa City. Many wires and trees came down, the power failed, and all the people watching fireworks in the park barely escaped when the storm passed ten feet over their heads. I knew that my daughter had been in the park with her mother that night, though I was not. At that time I was separated from the family; that particular evening I was at a birthday party for the girl who later became my second wife. Thus, that night had held a good deal of significance for me. Yet none of it was *in* the poem, nor did it seem to me that it *should* be. While I was writing this stanza, most of these problems had already occurred to me, yet something had wanted to keep that phrase about the Fourth of July. I had a moment of wild panic at the thought that perhaps I was becoming patriotic in my old age. Happily, I was soon able to quell *that* chimera. Yet, I still had my dilemma: if the Fourth of July didn't mean patriotism, what *did* it mean?

At this point, I put the poem aside, hoping that something might happen if I looked the other way. One Sunday morning several weeks later, I was sitting in a Quaker meeting when one of the members said something that annoyed me. In rough paraphrase, it went, "The measure of man's freedom is that he alone is given the power to reject God." I am always bothered by people, especially Quakers, who talk about God—I started going to meeting to escape people who talk about things they don't know about. My own habit is to paraphrase such statements, substituting for the term "God" either "Nature" or "Life," since those are at least terms about which I think a person

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might know something. When I tried paraphrasing the Quaker's statement, I found myself confronting one of my own central problems. Shortly, I heard myself saying that, in Nature, man alone has the choice to withdraw from the reality in which he lives, and so has the power to die, either metaphorically or literally. I was specially concerned about this then, because I had recently returned from my sister's funeral. It seemed to me that she, disapproving the life about her and unwilling to find any other, had withdrawn into a very destructive and self-deceiving relationship with her mother. This, of course, had satisfied none of her real needs, but she was unable to change her course; she developed a severe case of asthma. One's breath *is* one's life; it seemed to me that in refusing to breathe, she had taken the next step in rejecting her life. When her problem became progressively worse and she reached the age at which it must have been clear that she would never marry or have any independent career, she took the logical last step. On the morning of the Fourth of July (one year after the storm of which I spoke earlier), her heart simply quit beating. To die on Independence Day seemed an act of terrible and destructive blamefulness, yet this may have been, in its way, the easiest solution of her dilemma—she had died spiritually (that is, as an animal moved by aims and opinions) years before. But I was now once again disturbed about this, for my daughter had just had an asthma attack. I felt that this was *her* way of refusing *her* life. (It happens that I was wrong about this, but that has no essential bearing on the poem; what matters is that I *did* believe this and was profoundly disturbed by it.) I felt that I must find some way to tell her that she must choose what reality was possible—that she was, of course, full of rage and regret for what she could not have, but that she was hardly alone in that. She still must choose what was unavoidable. This was the particular rebirth I wanted that year.

It was not until after the meeting that I realized I had been talking about my poem. It must have been this whole complex of problems about freedom, breathing and asthma which had smuggled the Fourth of July into the poem. This, too, must link with the ironic rhyme-word "free" in the passage about cutting limbs off the trees, and again with the lines about snarling the pigeon in a net, for I apparently felt that I had helped snarl my daughter in a tangle of smother-love. It seemed to me—and I have often found this to be so—that my poem could develop a structure adequate to my experience only if, like the old sonata form, it carried two separate thematic areas at the same time. Plainly, the whole problem of freedom and guilt, which had at first been so very subordinate, must now be developed into a major thematic area, perhaps into the dominant theme.

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I went about this in two ways. First, I added new material. After my original first stanza, I added a new one about the time when the child took her first breath and, with it, accepted her life. At the end of the poem, I added two stanzas: first, one stanza about her present refusal of breath (presented, however, as a memory of an earlier attack); finally, a stanza to sum up what I wanted to say to her, and what could only be said more or less doctrinally, but which I hoped was new enough, or personal enough, to be worth an abstract statement.

Since this new material brought with it a progression from the time of the child's birth to her present illness, it seemed that the material already in the poem should be rearranged to fit this chronological order. This involved numerous small changes which will be obvious; the largest change involved taking the original last stanza (about the blackbird and the killdeers), which dealt with the breakup of the marriage, and moving this material back before the original third stanza (about hacking the wrenched limbs off the trees), which dealt with the divorce and separation.

I found also, that to make these additions and changes, I had to change my stanza pattern by adding one more syllable in each of the first three lines of every stanza, and two more syllables in the fourth line. Finally, I had to give up my lines about stone-skipping and the Sunday lovers on the riverbank. This nearly broke my heart, but I promised myself to work them into a later poem. Like almost every other promise I have ever made myself, this one remains unfulfilled.

This, then, is the final version which the poem reached after dozens and dozens of intervening versions:

HEART'S NEEDLE, vi.

Easter has come around
again; the river is rising
over the thawed ground
and the banksides. When you come you bring
an egg dyed lavender.
We shout along our bank to hear
our voices returning from the hills to meet us.
We need the landscape to repeat us.

You lived on this bank first.
While nine months filled your term, we knew
how your lungs, immersed
in the womb, miraculously grew
their useless folds till

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terrible air rushed in to fill
them like two shrubs bursting with leaves. You took your hour,
caught breath, and cried with your full lung power.

Over the stagnant bight
we see the hungry bank swallow
flaunting his free flight
still; we sink in mud to follow
the killdeer from the grass
that hides her nest. That March there was
rain; the rivers rose; you could hear killdeers flying
all night over the mudflats crying.

You bring back how the red-
winged blackbird shrieked, slapping frail wings,
diving at my head—
I saw where her tough nest, cradled, swings
in tall reeds that must sway
with the winds blowing every way.
If you recall much, you recall this place. You still
live nearby—on the opposite hill.

After the sharp windstorm
of July Fourth, all that summer
through the gentle, warm
afternoons, we heard great chain saws chirr
like iron locusts. Crews
of roughneck boys swarmed to cut loose
branches wrenched in the shattering wind, to hack free
all the torn limbs that could sap the tree.

In the debris lay
starlings, dead. Near the park's birdrun
we surprised one day
a proud, tan-spatted, buff-brown pigeon.
In my hands she flapped so
fearfully that I let her go.
Her keeper came. And we helped snarl her in a net.
You bring things I'd as soon forget.

You raise into my head
a Fall night that I came once more

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to sit on your bed;
sweat beads stood out on your arms and fore-
head and you wheezed for breath,
for help, like some child caught beneath
its comfortable woolly blankets, drowning there.
your lungs caught and would not take the air.

Of all things, only we
have power to choose that we should die;
nothing else is free
in this world, to refuse it. Yet I,
who say this, could not raise
myself from bed how many days
to the thieving world. Child, I have another wife,
another child. We try to choose our life.

This was, I thought, a better poem, more personal and so more universal. But that, in all seriousness, seemed a minor matter. It seemed more important that I had discovered what I needed to say. Looking back at the earlier poem, I can see now that it was sentimental and insincere. For, in the structure which it built (or jerrybuilt), it pretended that my feelings of grief were very important; they were not. Of course I had such feelings, but I had put them at the climactic point of my poem, not because they were actually important climactic feelings in my mind, but rather because I had carried those killdeers around with me for so many years waiting for a poem to put them in, and because the grief which they connoted seemed an obvious (because stereotyped) climax for a poem.

I am left, then, with a very old-fashioned measure of a poem's worth—the depth of its sincerity. And it seems to me that the poets of our generation—those of us who have gone so far in criticism and analysis that we cannot ever turn back and be innocent again, who have such extensive resources for disguising ourselves from ourselves—that our only hope as artists is to continually ask ourselves, "Am I writing what I *really* think? Not what is acceptable; not what my favorite intellectual would think in this situation; not what I wish I felt. Only what I cannot help thinking." For I believe that the only reality which a man can ever surely know is that self he cannot help being, though he will only know that self through its interactions with the world around it. If he pretties it up, if he changes its meaning, if he gives it the voice of any borrowed authority, if in short he rejects this reality, his mind will be less than alive. So will his words.

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LONDON LETTER

EXILE'S RETURN

When we left New York at the end of October it was cold and raining. My wife, by some premonition, already had flu, and the baby was crying despondently, naggingly. I didn't blame him. The ship was almost empty and a tiny knot of people huddled together for warmth in the great shed of the pier. Everyone seemed bored and speechless with the prolonged farewells. A pretty little blonde tried waving her handkerchief at us, but no one joined in or replied. When the ship pulled out the little crowd dutifully trailed down the shed to the end of the pier, where they stood in the rain, watching us mournfully. The ship's radio was playing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" and "Over There." But what Expeditionary Force we belonged to was not clear.

Yet it is surprising what a pleasure it is to arrive home, even despite yourself. Everything suddenly becomes unexciting, accustomed and, since this is England, easy. Suddenly, the pressure is off. England must be the easiest, gentlest country in the world to return to. The barmaid on the tender that took us off at Plymouth, who served tea, called everyone "Dearie," and proclaimed incredulously that Arsenal was head of the League; the depressed clerk at the exchange desk who immediately ran out of money and sadly left us to queue for half an hour—the first queue I had been in for fourteen months; the slow policemen who bullied us mildly from one official to another; the customs officer, red face and naval uniform like a W. W. Jacobs salt, who took one flabbergasted look at our vast mound of luggage, at the crying baby and my wife still peaked and wan with the flu, and let us through with his condolences; they all had that gently avuncular air that is the last legacy of the British raj. It has been immortalized by *The Times* which unfailingly maintains the placidity of a long, not very newsy letter from some maiden aunt with clerical connections (it is odd that the only consistently witty writing in that paper should be in the columns of the two Jamesian stylists who deal with the cricket and rugger).

Surprising, too, in another way, how immediately pretty and sooth-

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ing the southern English landscape seemed under the pale wintry sun: Devon melancholy and undulating, with its tiny fields and meditative horses; then over the bleaker, dimmer stretches of the Hardy country into the comfortable Thames Valley; finally, into the wastes of outer London and the fog. Everywhere was the same muffled quiet. Even the London traffic, now almost as heavy as New York's, though slower, seemed subdued and painstaking. From October onward, there is always a thin veil of mist over England that unpicks all detail. Even the ponderous, wealthy Edwardian facades of London seemed queerly undefined, insubstantial, as though they were about to dissolve away. You drift out from the hushed, echoing church of a station, and the evening fog goes over you like sleep. After a lifetime in England an eternity in Limbo will be nothing.

The same still emptiness seemed to cling to the London literary jungle, where the knives usually are sharp and ready enough. But in November nothing was happening. There were no crazes, no cocktail party manias. This, heaven knows, was a relief. Last time I arrived from the States, London was *en plein* Colin Wilson. Now Mr. Wilson's name is mentioned only in the dailies, and that only when his stove blows up or someone threatens to horsewhip him. The madness has now passed and poor Mr. Wilson has been knocked down again by the same people who set him up. In the whole nasty business there remains only one real puzzle: why none of the dirt came off on his original boosters. After all, when Mr. Wilson's second book was panned for lacking the stamina, style and "importance" of *The Outsider,* he announced that the two books had originally been one; he had separated them only for the convenience of his publisher. Had this kind of mistake been made in the properly public world the government officials to blame would have acknowledged their irresponsibility by resigning. Yet only Philip Toynbee gave reasons for changing his mind. But then, what can Dame Edith Sitwell and Mr. Cyril Connolly resign from? The Cult of Personality? Since most reviewing has no more definite basis than that, the stars can no more resign or acknowledge their mistakes than Prince Ras Monalulu can apologize for a bad tip (the "Prince" is a famous Negro showman who tours the English racecourses, where he sells tips and tells funny stories). The craze is dead, long live the craze.

The literary calm was, however, largely due to the fact that most of the brighter younger men (comparatives are now in order since all of them are, at least, well into their thirties) were in the States: Kingsley Amis at Princeton, John Wain at the MacDowell Colony, Philip Toynbee on tour and Ken Tynan in New York. And for those left behind the

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last rallying point had gone: G.S. Fraser, whose flat had for years been the meeting place of young writers, had packed up and gone to teach at the University of Leicester. The fog reigned undisturbed.

But not for long. On December 1st the calm was disastrously shattered. With the young men off the field, the Old Guard moved back in force. The occasion was the publication of *The Collected Poems of John Betjeman,* with a preface, for no apparent reason, by Lord Birkenhead. Now, Mr. Betjeman is a skillful, harmless, minor writer of light verse, who is most successful when hymning *les petits plaisirs des riches;* he writes little panegyrics on bullying tennis girls, the nostalgia of boarding schools and the hidden charms of Victorian architectural monstrosities. His subjects, in short, are the rather delicious trials and tribulations of being upper middle class. He also writes bad, religiose poems about death. He is a kind of Evelyn Waugh of light verse, though with none of Waugh's early savagery. At best, his work is clever, amusing and rings a small bell in everyone who has been through the Public School mill. At worst, it is embarrassing much in the manner of the U-non-U controversy (to which he contributed). But no one, apart from a few mildly eccentric English dons at Oxford, had ever taken it particularly seriously; certainly not Mr. Betjeman who, by all accounts, is a gentle, modest man. He was probably as surprised as anyone else to find himself set up overnight as a major popular poet, a kind of Robert Frost in Savile Row clothing. But there he was. Of all the influential papers, only *The New Statesman* had a really critical word to say of him. For the rest, he was a symbol of everything that was fine and lasting in English poetry. In two and a half months 33,400 copies of his book have been sold. This is almost certainly a good many more than the *Collected Poems* of T.S. Eliot sold in as many years. Moreover, Mr. Betjeman's sales show no sign of dropping. He is the first best-selling poet his publisher has had since Byron.

Nobody, of course, grudges Mr. Betjeman his success. He has, at least, stuck to his reactionary guns through all the great revolutions of modern poetry. His success is belated, inevitable and deserved. What is depressing about it is simply its scale, and its literary and political implications. In terms of literature, the fact that Mr. Betjeman's book has become a best-seller—and the first poetry best-seller since heaven only knows when—means quite simply, I think, that the revolution called "modern poetry," on which all our critical standards are founded, never took place for a huge proportion of the English poetry-reading public. They are still living in some hazy pre-Prufrock Never-Never

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Land. All the creative effort of Eliot, Yeats and Auden, and the painful fight to establish critical standards and a fresh tradition by men like Richards, Leavis and Empson, have apparently done no good at all. It is as though the Victorians had suddenly tried to reverse the order of things by building up Mr. Betjeman's counterpart, Thomas Hood, into a major poet. As Stevenson said on another occasion: "I'm too old to cry, but it hurts too much to laugh."

Politically, the craze for Mr. Betjeman's work is not so unexpected. According to the Gallup polls, the Conservatives are still ahead, despite everything. And Mr. Betjeman's Toryism is of the witty, nostalgic brand that the English always find irresistable. It is, at least, nowhere near so tiresome or offensive as, say, Sir Osbert Sitwell's ponderous assaults on the Welfare State.

It may be that this peculiar taste for Mr. Betjeman's work is not such a lugubrious portent for the state of British culture as I have made out. He has had, after all, a minor success of late as a TV eccentric. But it is more likely that it is simply a manifestation of the Englishmen's insatiable passion for clever light verse, particularly when it reminds them of their Old School. But I must add that they seem to have no compensating passion for serious poetry. For instance, Edwin Muir, who, with Robert Graves, was one of the most distinguished and original native British poets to survive the First World War, died of a heart attack on January 3rd. Despite his distinction as a poet he was still, at the age of seventy-one, having to support himself as best he could by the dreary grind of reviewing. A number of his friends have suggested that the continual pressure of hack work may well have hastened his death. My point is quite simply that if the Great British Public paid its distinguished poets a fraction of the attention it lavishes on its light versifiers "the hope for poetry" would be a good deal brighter. As it is, Edwin Muir had to drudge away at Sunday reviews until his death. The glowing, almost apologetic, obituaries must have been very cold comfort.

Not all the signs, however, are bad. One of the best, and most unexpected, is that Miss Hannah Arendt's great contribution to political philosophy, *The Human Condition,* was chosen as one of the three best books of the year by three different critics in *The Observer's* annual round-up. Considering the seriousness and difficulty of Miss Arendt's book and the competition from the usual memoirs of the usual fading aristocrats, this must be almost unprecedented.

There are also stirrings on the literary left. In the spring of 1957,

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Stuart Hall, a young Jamaican Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, hopefully founded yet another left-wing periodical. The reaction, even then, was surprisingly enthusiastic and now, after five numbers, the circulation of the *Universities and Left Review* is over 7000. It deserves to be. It is one of the very few periodicals in England now publishing really serious, detailed articles, written with coherent and defined criteria—like them or not—and allowing its contributors all the acerbity and space they need, sometimes to the point of tedium. It is also the only non-specialist magazine in England to get to work on that great new American industry, mass culture. The *U.L.R.* has its faults: it is too doctrinaire, too predictable; it has from time to time a pie-in-the-sky idealism that sorts oddly with its sane, intellectual toughness; and the poetry, chosen presumably solely for its content, is for the most part appalling. But it shows signs of life and activity that are unusual in the London intellectual world.

One of the signs is to have opened up a coffee-bar, *The Partisan,* which, when it has paid for itself, will plough back its profits into the *U.L.R. The Partisan,* officially, is an anti-coffee-bar coffee-bar: no plants climb up your leg if you sit there more than half an hour; no stuffed parrots eye you coldly through bamboo lattice-work; there is no background music to put you off your food; the only gesture toward current Bohemian café fashions is the optional chess-sets. Instead, the place has been designed in the best air-raid shelter style: sparsely painted concrete, skeletal stairs, two levels, and a dug-out within the dug-out below for the boys. Heaven knows, the air-raid atmosphere is contagious: I kept thinking uneasily that one bomb on this lot and the British left-wing intelligentsia would largely be done for. But otherwise the tone of the place in the evening was relaxed enough. It had none of the feeling most usual in Bohemian cafés that everyone resented everyone else as somehow detracting from his unique act. Instead, the inmates were unusually cheerful and friendly with each other, as though they were all there to sign up for some crusade—which perhaps they were. In the afternoons, however, the art-students take over, and the mixture is as self-conscious as anywhere else.

Finally, there is *Lolita.* Of course. I doubt if any book since the King James Bible has been more eagerly awaited and so avidly discussed, particularly since I have met almost no one who has in fact read it. It has been brought up by the M. P.'s in the House of Commons and by the police in Bow Street Station; by critics, lawyers, *aficionados* of all banned books regardless of race, color or quality; by defenders of public

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morality and by the usual letter-writing cranks in *The Times, The Observer, The New Statesman, The Spectator* and, for all I know, in every other paper. Of all the journals I read, the only one so far not to mention *Lolita* is *Motor Sport*. Even the gutter press has been on to it; one of them ran a front-page article on the theme: "It could happen to *your* daughter. But, mothers, you may be to blame." When the thing is finally published in the spring—if despite all the goings on, the indignation and the threatened legal procedures, it *is* published—it will almost certainly be an anti-climax. It would take a work a good deal more substantial than poor *Lolita* to stand the strain. But it is just possible that the fuss may be a bit too late. The youth of England may already be corrupted. My evidence is not the Notting Hill race riots, nor the gang wars of the Seven Sisters Road, which have made *West Side Story* a sell-out. It is based, instead, on a conversation I overheard the other day in a seedy little local newsagent. A nymphet, aged about ten, leaned confidentially towards the proprietor and piped: "Have you got my copy of *The Girls' Book of Queers?*" And they have banned Nabokov! "O Lola! O my Lolita!" as he would say.

A. Alvarez

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BOOKS

ON EXISTENCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

IRRATIONAL MAN. By William Barrett. Doubleday. $5.00.

Some ten years ago William Barrett published an essay, "What is Existentialism?" in the short-lived PR pamphlet series. He has now come back to the subject in a full-length book. In the meantime, the waters have flowed on under the bridges of the Seine; the Fourth Republic has given way to the Fifth; and the cult of French existentialism —which was then in the public limelight—has yielded the floor to the Dharma bums.

The present work is much more than a study of contemporary existentialism. It consists of four parts. The first part locates "the advent of existentialism" in the context of our culture, science, philosophy, and art. The second part provides a historical background: it goes back to the sources of existentialism in Hebrew, Greek and Christian literature; and it develops the special theme of the romantic revolt against the age of Enlightenment. The third part presents the thoughts of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre. And the concluding section is a brief (all too brief, I think) estimate of the significance of existential philosophy.

Readers of this magazine know that Mr. Barret is a very fine, sensitive, and subtle writer. Thus he succeeds, as others do not, in translating the ideas of existential thinkers into a non-technical, literary language that is a pleasure to read. He is most successful in the most difficult assignment—the chapter on Heidegger. His presentation here is a superb achievement which even the expert should find helpful. Another welcome and distinguished feature of this study is the intimate knowledge of the arts that Mr. Barrett brings to philosophy. I wish he had done more with "the testimony of modern art"; yet as it stands this chapter as well as that on "the flight from Laputa" which deals with the romantic revolt against modern rationalism, from Gulliver's voyage to Laputa to Dostoevski's *Underground Man,* make an important contribution to our understanding of the existential themes in modern art and literature.

There are many other things in this book which are original in

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thought and presentation—and with which I agree. Mr. Barrett and I have shared a similar professional experience. For many years we were academic outsiders, as it were, during the heydays of the boom in analytic and scientific philosophy. Thus I also find myself in sympathy with Mr. Barrett's spirited defense of existential thought and his critical forays against the sterile scholasticism and pretentious scientism of logical positivism. This good fight may not even be necessary at this stage of the game. Positivism, to be sure, continues to beat its drums loudly in a few academic enclaves. Moreover, as an intellectual attitude and as a methodological tool, it is firmly entrenched in the corporate structure of science, technology, and bureaucracy; and I see no prospect of dislodging it from this stronghold. But as a *Weltanschauung,* or a philosophy of life, positivism has had its brief hour upon the stage of our times and is heard no more. In fact, it is not difficult to detect, among the logical positivists themselves, that they are secretly hankering after intellectual, yes, spiritual nourishment that would make up for the dietary deficiencies in their philosophical *Lebenswelt.* Existentialist ideas and postures, on the other hand, have so far permeated the intellectual and cultural climate of the 'fifties that I tend to view this development with more concern than Mr. Barrett does. Thus precisely because there is a considerable area of agreement between us, it is perhaps appropriate if I also record that I believe that there are basic issues on which I would seriously differ from Mr. Barrett's reading of existential philosophy. In the limited space at my disposal, these critical comments cannot but create a distorted impression in that they tend to obscure those parts of Mr. Barrett's study for which I have nothing but high respect.

To begin with, I was puzzled by the title. I first thought that "irrational man" was a concession to the publisher's need for a catchy blurb; but as I read on, it became clear that the title corresponded to Mr. Barrett's own thoughts on the subject of existentialism. The major theme of his study is the discovery of irrationalism, or the rediscovery of the Furies, in man and society. Now this theme, as Thomas Mann noted a long time ago, is open to a fateful ambiguity: it is one thing to say that we have discovered irrational powers in man and society—surely, we don't need existential thinkers to bring this truth home to us; it is quite another thing to say that this discovery entitles us to appeal to these underground powers as superior sources of human knowledge or in celebrating "irrational man" as a superior type of being. Mr. Barrett, I believe, does not come to grips with this ambiguity; or insofar as he does, he seems to resolve it in favor of irrational man.

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The historical villain of the piece is the age of Enlightenment. "Existentialism is the counter-Enlightenment come at last to philosophic expression; and it demonstrates beyond anything else that the ideology of the Enlightenment is thin, abstract, and therefore dangerous." This summing-up of the significance of existentialism is, I believe, misleading: it makes for a one-sided interpretation of existentialism and a one-sided reading of the Enlightenment, which I do not share.

It is, of course, true that the simple eighteenth-century faith in reason, production, and education as the chief vehicles of human progress has exploded in the H-bomb; it is also true that the abstract rationalism of mathematical science and the technological apparatus has contributed to the alienation of modern man; finally, there is no doubt that a principal objective of the existentialist movement, from Marx to Sartre, has been to reverse this process of alienation. But after we have recalled these truths, it is perhaps also time to take a new look at the Enlightenment. For the official and popular interpretations of this age frequently reflect conventional stereotypes which only serve to reinforce the irrationalism of our own culture. In pointing to the deficiencies of the Enlightenment, we may see the mote in the age of reason, but not the beam in the ages of unreason.

Thus it is also worth recalling that ages of Enlightenment have been relatively brief and rare in the history of mankind. The heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosopher was a brief interlude, too, preceded and superseded by ages in which magic, mystery, and authority predominate. It is a vast overstatement, if not a gross error, to suggest that the fatal flaws in our culture are due to the spirit of rationalism propagated by the Enlightenment. Secondly, after we have exposed the dangers of science and technology, we should not forget that they are *also* vicious and destructive because they operate in a world devoid of reason. Of course, they helped to create this brave, new world; but who used them and why? Thirdly, it is another stereotype to think that the shadow-world of man did not exist for the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Voltaire and Hume were not blind to irrationalism, superstition, and madness. Kant, who wrote a brilliant essay in defense of human enlightenment, was just as obsessed with the radically evil nature of man. "It is hard to suppress a certain disgust," he confessed, "when contemplating men's action upon the world stage. For one finds, in spite of apparent wisdom in detail, that everything taken as a whole is interwoven with stupidity, childish vanity, viciousness and destructiveness. In the end, one does not know what kind of conception one should have of our species which is so conceited about its

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superior qualities." Finally, it is another mistake to believe that "rationalism" for these thinkers meant nothing but a capacity for abstract, scientific reasoning or an opportunity for the technical manipulation of machines and men. On the contrary, rationalism meant that reason may be employed in the world of human affairs quite differently from the way it operates in the logic of science; it meant that man is endowed with freedom and dignity and worth more than the irrational "market price" put upon him everywhere. "Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity." That is Kant speaking, not Freud.

It is time to reconsider these aspects of the Enlightenment, not to mention Schiller's aesthetic philosophy or Goethe's pagan classicism lest we see this movement merely in the simplified, thin version of the contributors to the *Encyclopedie* or in the distorted image of romantic visionaries. For if existentialism be nothing but the counter-Enlightenment, then, I am afraid, its critics are right in saying that it is nothing but another outburst of romantic irrationalism in our time. Mr. Barrett has his own misgivings on this point. "It may seem strange," he admits in the end, "that rationalism has been made so much of a target throughout this book . . . The fact is that a good dose of intellectualism—genuine intellectualism—would be a very helpful thing in American life." Unfortunately, this belated and non-specific plea introduces a note of unresolved discord; for the dominant theme running through Mr. Barrett's study is that the intellect leads man into a desperate *cul de sac* from which nothing but his irrational powers can extricate him.

Mr. Barrett leans toward this extreme solution because he deeply feels the limits imposed upon the powers of the human mind. The intellect encounters nothing but checks and failures. It cannot comprehend the contradictions and sufferings of human existence. It cannot even make peace in its own house: the logical foundations of mathematics and physics also reveal surds and paradoxes. In short, reason is a feeble master; and the abyss of the irrational and nothingness looms everywhere. There is much to be said for this existential thesis that we hover at the brink of nothingness; but Mr. Barrett again uses this thesis in a deceptively ambiguous fashion. For it is one thing to say that man is finite, in body, mind, or any other power—I don't know anybody who has ever denied this; it is quite a different thing to say that, *because* the powers of the human mind are finite, there must be other sources of knowledge which carry us beyond them; or worse, that there must be a kind of knowledge, not only "beyond reason," but "if need be, *against* reason" in the Kierkegaardian sense of being

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paradoxical and absurd. Mr. Barrett seems to think that there is much to be said for this kind of knowledge which man has "through body and blood, bones and bowels . . . through the passionate adhesion of faith to the Being whom he can never intellectually know." He finds it in the Biblical knight of faith and in St. Paul as well as in the regions of the "collective psyche" and the "chthonic unconscious."

This is, of couse, a familiar trend in existential philosophy—from Kierkegaard to C.G. Jung. But while it may be satisfying and rewarding insofar as it provides grounds for a leap into faith, it causes nothing but havoc in philosophy. For now we have obviously moved to a point where we not only discover irrational man, but justify his existence as representing a higher type of being, endowed with a more profound knowledge than the poor rational man who struggles hard to make his own world as intelligible as possible. When it comes to "thinking" in these depths of our blood and guts, we create nothing but muddled confusion in which the dreams of ghostseers are indistinguishable from the hard-won, priceless conquests of disciplined thought.

Thus I submit that if existentialism be more than a romantic return to the irrational substrata of life and thought, if it be more than theology or poetry, there must be another side to it which does not come out in Mr. Barrett's study. This is the aspect of existentialism which moves *beyond* the romantic revolt and *back* to the Enlightenment. Mr. Barrett is least successful, I think, when he comes to consider existential philosophers who have tried to reappropriate the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment in order to move beyond romanticism. Thus he describes Sartre's concept of freedom as "demoniacal"; but this is the language of religion borrowed from Kierkegaard. It prejudges or evades the issue at stake in philosophy, whether Sartre has presented existential thought with a genuine alternative to the irrational man of faith. It overlooks the crucial point that Sartre is nothing if he is not an "intellectual." *Being and Nothingness* is not only an exercise in existential nihilism, but also an expression of Cartesian rationalism. Sartre subscribes to this perennial standard of the French intellectual tradition (including the *cogito* as his point of departure) just as he invokes reformulation of Kant's rationalism in order to cope with the problem of ethics in existentialism. Similarly, Camus (in *L'Eté* or *The Rebel*) moves beyond the dark despair of Sisyphus in Hades to the luminous beauty of Helen and to a celebration of the clear translucent light of summer in the Greek-Meridian world. These are his symbols for clinging to an ideal of aesthetic and intellectual lucidity. Both French writers reflect, as did Gide, the influence of Nietzsche.

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Not surprisingly, therefore, Nietzsche is a source of real trouble to Mr. Barrett. In the chapter on Kierkegaard, he explicitly and rightly warns the reader against a psychoanalytic interpretation; in the case of Nietzsche, however, Mr. Barrett himself takes the stance of an allegedly "unprejudiced psychological observer" who notes that "the process of ego-inflation has already gone beyond . . . neurosis." Perhaps so; but surely there is no difference between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard as case studies in psychopathology. Nor will it do to charge Nietzsche with "failure as a thinker" because he "did not come to terms with his own devil." This is again the language of religion, whether orthodox or psychological, where the alternative is either God or Satan; or it is the language of poetry. But philosophy is neither theology nor poetry if for no other reason than the fact that both God and Satan may be judged in a philosophical inquiry—and found wanting.

Hence, Nietzsche's ideas, too, must be taken out of this religious-psychological context if they are to be taken seriously and if they are not to be misrepresented. The much abused concept of the "will to power" does not mean, as Mr. Barrett says, "power for power's sake"—that puts Nietzsche into the political dimension he detested; but power for the sake of self-mastery or for the sake of capturing a moment of eternal joy on earth, which puts him into the ranks of existential thinkers. More importantly, the highest expression of the will to power is the will to truth. It is upon this stubborn will that Christianity and bourgeois morality suffer shipwreck. Thus Nietzsche was not only the romantic Dionysian of the "Birth of Tragedy"; he was also a free, hard, and enlightened spirit—a great skeptic. "Great spirits are skeptics," he wrote in his last work. "Zarathustra is a skeptic. Strength—freedom which is born of the strength of the spirit—proves itself by skepticism. . . .Conversely, the need for faith. . . is a need born of weakness." Nor did he fail to see that this was hard to take for people who were looking for inner peace and blessedness. "What does it mean to have integrity in matters of the spirit? That one is severe against one's heart, that one despises 'beautiful sentiments.' " He repudiated the popular, pragmatic justification of faith, i.e., the argument that "faith makes blessed; hence, it is true." Beliefs are not true because they induce beautiful states of mind or soul; on the contrary, he concluded "faith makes blessed; consequently, it lies."

These aspects of Nietzsche's thought are not to be found in Mr. Barrett's account; yet they are very important because they indicate that existentialism may appear in quite a different light. Nietzsche occupies a pivotal place in modern thought precisely because, though deep-

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ly steeped in the romantic mood of Schopenhauer and Wagner, he was also a great anti-romantic thinker. His personal break with Wagner was also a turning away from the apotheosis of romanticism in Wagner's music dramas and a turning back to the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment. "This Enlightenment we must now advance further—unconcerned with the fact that there has been a 'great revolution' against it." Thus existentialism is not merely the counter-Enlightenment; it is also a form of counter-romanticism. And it commands a respectful hearing, I believe, precisely because it has tried to render intelligible in a critical, philosophical discourse what was previously expressed or hidden in the romantic discourse of religion and poetry.

Now how do we make things intelligible except by throwing the light of intelligence upon them; i.e., by thinking as clearly, lucidly, and self-critically as possible? This ideal is not a characteristic of irrational man. If we approximate it anywhere, making due allowance for the finite and limited powers of man, it is in the dimension of human intelligence, or in the *lumen naturale,* the natural light of reason in the old-fashioned language of the Enlightenment. Heidegger himself appealed to this *lumen naturale* in order to define "truth" as "unhiddenness"—a state of being in which the original, true qualities and meanings in the human world *(Dasein)* emerge from hiding into openness, from darkness into light. And surely *Sein und Zeit,* a cornerstone in contemporary existentialism, is the product of a powerful intelligence as is Sartre's *Being and Nothingness.* Both works represent a highly concentrated effort of hard thinking; both mobilize and exercise the resources of human intelligence, not the dark powers and the blindspots of irrational man; both belong to a "rational" discourse even though the kind of thinking they employ and exhibit differs from that in science and traditional philosophy.

When, in his later works, Heidegger began to practice philosophical "poetry" instead of painstaking intellectual and existential analysis, the rational discourse of *Sein und Zeit* dissolved into obscurantism, word-magic, and verbal necromancy. I know that to some people these esoteric mysteries discovered by the late Heidegger are bewitching and profound truths; I find them most unintelligible. They make no sense because they no longer serve to enlighten, but to obscure. And when, in 1933, he discovered the *Fuehrer,* or the Nazi movement, at the "Ground of Being"—those who believed in the "chthonic unconscious" fell into the same trap—the nonsense was disgusting. It is to the credit of Karl Jaspers that he saw, during those years, that the task of existential philosophy was not to sell irrational man

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to the world, but to devise a formula which might reconcile the seemingly contradictory dimensions of existence and reason; and it is no accident that he adopted a formula which goes back to Kant's enlightened rationalism; "Existence only becomes clear through reason; reason only has content through existence." In other words, existentialism without reason leads into the blind alleys of irrationalism.

It is unfortunate, I think, that Mr. Barrett did not bring out these blind alleys of existentialism, or that he did not see existentialism in this critical perspective of the Enlightenment. For existentialism is not an unmixed blessing in the modern world; it is also a great danger and often a terrible poison to men's minds. It is an advance in philosophy only to the extent to which it has shown that intellectual clarity, lucidity, and integrity can also be exercised and shared in regions of the human world hitherto unexplored or heretofore excluded from philosophical analysis. It is a step backward, I believe, if it be used to celebrate the superior status of irrational man. I call this a step backward because we don't need philosophy to bring this appeal home to modern man.

Hans Meyerhoff

A FANTASTIC VOYAGE

HENDERSON THE RAIN KING. By Saul Bellow. Viking. $4.50.

"What made me take this trip to Africa?"—opening sentence of Saul Bellow's new novel, *Henderson the Rain King*. Henderson is fifty-five, worth three million dollars, the descendant of a Secretary of State, the son of a man who was a "friend of William James and Henry Adams." The blood of his ancestors has, in him, begun to run thin in so far as public, practical or intellectual affairs are concerned. Henderson could not be elected or appointed dog catcher; he has brains and a vast trust fund of attitudes but he hasn't the quiet or the discipline for the romantic, dedicated careers of his early idols, Sir Wilfred Grenfell and Albert Schweitzer. He is, actually, a kind of well-born, well-heeled beatnik. He is fractured, but not miserable. His life is full of the dirt, confusion and rowdiness possible to a man living in free squalor on a huge income. Two marriages, brawls in village taverns near his pig farm, runins with the local police, arguments at home: from these and all the

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complications of his character Henderson decides to hit the road to Africa in search of Sensation and Truth. He has physical strength, as a complement to his financial weight; a fair number of the aches and pains of dissipation and dentistry; and a large dose of breezy boredom, wise-cracking wonder. Henderson's story is a search, an adventure, a quest; it is that drama as old as history, in which a man, worn with himself, goes to a far-away land in search of what we call his own identity and to learn, perhaps, the meaning of back-home.

The Africa Henderson goes to is not colonial Africa, racial Africa or even the game hunter's Africa. It is a joke Africa with whimsical tribes, fat native queens and a faithful guide, a travelogue Queequeg, darkly devoted. There are tall tales about lions. The scenes are wild and yet tender; the bum millionaire, Henderson, is breezy, boastful, sentimental, philosophical. His despair is diluted by his cheerful language, which is Broadway, hip. When he tries to get the frogs out of the drinking water he blows up the retaining wall and frogs, water and all run out. "It's the same old story with me; as soon as I come amongst people I screw something up—I goof." Henderson has the soul of an artist; he might be an action painter or he might, wearing a little goatee, be Dizzy Gillespie. He thinks in a style afraid of pretension and yet overflowing with boozy speculations. "Oh, you can't get away from rhythm. . . . The left hand shakes with the right hand, the inhale follows the exhale, the systole talks back to the diastole. . . . And the tides, and all that junk. . . . Hell, we'll never get away from rhythm. . . . But the king said I should change. I shouldn't be an agony type. Or a Lazarus type. The grass should be my cousins. . . ."

In *The Victim* and his extraordinary story, *Seize the Day,* Bellow wrote in a manner that is somehow "Russian"—that is, he created works of realistic fiction in which the events and characters were suffused with a mysterious glow of meaning and signification. The plots are as tight as works for the stage and the stories gave the reader unusual intellectual and artistic satisfaction. In an airless, urban scene, he put down his characters, men deep in predicament, sinking in bad luck or moral uncertainty. The style is tense, with a peculiarly nervous keenness of observation and expression.

The Victim and *Seize the Day* are short and dramatic; in between them came *The Adventures of Augie March,* which is long and episodic, narrated in the first person like *Henderson the Rain King,* and has another embattled, wise-guy hero, a "traveling man." There is a bizarre incompatibility between the two styles, the two conceptions of subject

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matter. Bellow has a superb gift for characterization and milieu—but *Henderson the Rain King* is a book deliberately without any characters at all. The hero is not a character in the usual sense. He tells us something, indeed much, about his past but he is seen as a figure in a fantasy, a great not-unlikely American going through absurd, unbelievable scenes with various story-book African tribes. The setting is composed of vivacious words coming, as they used to say, from a "fevered artistic brain" rather than from any true observation of geography or actual terrain. The standard to be applied here is not that of realistic fiction, but of, we suppose, odd works like *Don Quixote* or *Gulliver's Travels*. The fantastic journey is perilous. If a work in this form does not succeed brilliantly it is likely to fail dismally. Instead of accuracy the writer will have to call upon the rarest imaginative inspiration. A real man can only be evicted from a real place to make room for the universal destiny, playing itself out among eternal scenery. The impulse to incur these risks is usually the satiric talent expressing itself. But Bellow's book is not a satire although it has satiric bits. Perhaps it is meant as a piece of comic exuberance like *A Sentimental Journey*. But Sterne's post horses and chaises dash up to real inns.

Henderson, then, is not a "character" but he is an "American"—traveling about a dry continent he ends up as a god who makes rain. In his adventures there are possible interpretations, perhaps even "world-wide implications" tucked away here and there if one wanted to look for them. They do not come readily to mind, giving the reader the sense that however ridiculous and unreal the events are they represent human helplessness or folly. When Henderson throws out the water with the frogs are we thinking of bungling engineers in the Point Four Program?

It is another part of the joke that Bellow, very shortly before the publication of this novel, should have expressed himself against "deep readers" and symbolic interpretation on the front page of the book section of *The New York Times*. *Henderson* cannot be read except deeply, nor be understood except symbolically. And the fact that this is so, that the literal meaning is rather thin in dramatic texture, and that, nevertheless "deep" and symbolical meanings do not jump out at us is a real fault. The scenery is too unreal for picaresque comedy; the events have too little resonance for symbolic fantasy.

Bellow is everywhere felt to be among the best of the young novelists and many would rate him first. *Henderson the Rain King* is very much less to my taste than his previous work and yet it is not exactly to be designated a "falling off" or even a "standing still," a repetition. It is an autonomous work, a mutation. There is a suggestion of it in

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Augie March, but that novel is closer in spirit to *The Victim* and *Seize the Day* than to *Henderson the Rain King.* This last novel is an incredibly secure piece of composition—profuse, splashy, relaxed. It is large and Bellow seems to want largeness, as though he felt his own position as an important American novelist imposed the responsibility for a large effort. He will not, knowing our artistic retreats, be guilty of "the refusal of greatness." But he may, eager courtier, travel too far in pursuit.

Elizabeth Hardwick

FITZGERALD AT THE END

BELOVED INFIDEL. By Sheilah Graham and Gerold Frank. Henry Holt and Co. $3.95.

> "Yes," objected Amory, "but isn't it lack of will-power to let my imagination shinny on the wrong side?"—*This Side of Paradise.*

In 1938, so the story is often told, when Walter Wanger assigned the young Budd Shulberg to collaborate with F. Scott Fitzgerald on a script for a movie about Dartmouth, Shulberg said, "Fitzgerald—I thought he was dead." So too, apparently, had the group of drama students who produced "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" in a small room above the Pasadena Playhouse in 1939 and who were nonplussed and embarrassed to receive a backstage visit from Fitzgerald—in full evening dress—on opening night. It was not so much that Fitzgerald had disappeared—he was publishing a little in those days, though by his former standards very little; and after all *Tender is the Night* had come out only in 1934. It was that by some kind of unspoken consensus Fitzgerald was labeled "Finished" and put away. Perhaps at the time there was a deep public courtesy involved in thinking him dead, for his life, which neither he nor anyone else had ever succeeded in separating from his work, had become an ugly spectacle, marked by illness and Zelda's insanity and alcohol and failure. The man—like the "Age" he had been saddled with representing, like the American Dream itself—had finally collapsed. He was violently and often viciously drunk much of the time. He was in debt, apparently unable to work. And in 1936, when to do such a thing was taken to be a clear sign of "selling out," he went off to Hollywood to make some money and learn how to write successful

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movies. He himself had publicly announced his collapse in three articles in *Esquire* ("The Crack-Up," "Handle With Care," "Pasting It Together"). The articles were of course in their very nature a lie: true, they were the exploration of their author's feeling of personal ruin, his "spiritual bankruptcy," but they were also among the strongest and most trenchant products of a writer still capable of first-rate work.

When in 1940 Fitzgerald did die he left behind six chapters of a novel and voluminous notes for its completion. He left behind, too, a feeling, and one that has persisted through the last eighteen years of posthumous publication and reams of serious criticism and acclaim, that some special redress of a wrong is due him. Or if "redress" and "wrong" are too emphatic, that some kind of subtle imbalance in the world's view of Fitzgerald must be set right. At the end of his biography Arthur Mizener says "Like Gatsby . . . Fitzgerald loved reputation, the public acknowledgement of genuine achievement, with the impersonal magnanimity of a Renaissance prince. He lived, finally, to give that chaos in his head shape in his books and to see the knowledge that he had done so reflected back to him from the world. He died believing he had failed. Now we know better, and it is one of the final ironies of Fitzgerald's career that he did not live to enjoy our knowledge." That "now we know better," written ten years after Fitzgerald's death and at the end of a painstaking biography, strikes the curious personal note of apology—not so much for Fitzgerald as *to* him—that sounds so often in the writing about him.

Now Sheilah Graham, who lived with Fitzgerald during his last four years, has written her autobiography and the section about their life together is also a moving personal defense of him.

Sheilah Graham was sent to Hollywood by the North American Newspaper Alliance to take over its syndicated movie gossip column. Before coming to America from London, she had held many posts in a rather stunning career of imposture and social climbing: born Lily Sheil in London's East End and raised in an orphanage, with no education, no experience and a bad accent, by her late 'twenties she had managed to marry respectably, to make something of a success on the musical comedy stage, to be presented at court, to crash the society of the English country aristocracy, and finally to get in some semi-professional experience as a newspaper feature-writer. *Beloved Infidel* is unfortunately one of those autobiographical memoirs written in collaboration with Gerold Frank, in which all the author's real feelings, ideas, and responses to

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what has happened in life are buried beneath the most irritating narrative style ever invented. Everything in the book is reduced to an event coming at Miss Graham from the outside; her own part in it gets squeezed into a few handy mass-magazine formulas ("This was wonderful. This was the answer to everything" or "Even now, I wonder, who looked after me?")—so that the reader is left begging for a little relief from the specter of those wide-open baby-blue eyes. Nevertheless, merely from Sheilah Graham's story itself, and from the reconstruction all its flatly-told facts makes inevitable, one can understand something of what must have been, what must be, the quality of this remarkable woman. There is, for instance, the fact that at each crucial moment of her life some man was waiting, and always just the man needed, to give her the protection and the training for the next audacious push of her ambition—the acme of which, I suppose, was reached in a proposal of marriage from the Marquess of Donegall, who has one of the oldest peerages in Britain. She was pretty; she was absolutely devoted to the climb; but these are somehow not enough to account for her astonishing career. Beyond them what she clearly had was grace, some midas touch of the personality. However, what makes her most remarkable of all is that, with her gift of grace and given her lower-class romance about the rich and her totally expedient morality, she did not stop with the British aristocracy, the Marquess of Donegall, her fantasy of having children called the Earl of Belfast and the Lady Wendy of Chichester. She went on to an American newspaper career and to Fitzgerald. She never makes clear what prompted her to this last seemingly unaccountable step. She says she went to America looking for "love," but love is something no more easily to be found in New York than in London, and her street sense must have told her so even if her romantic literary ego no longer does. She describes a very unpretty scene between Randolph Churchill and Charlie Chaplin at a posh London restaurant in which Churchill was overbearing and arrogant and Chaplin was obsequious, and talks of her own shock at discovering that even genius must bow to the blood. Years earlier, as a hungry young girl strolling down Piccadilly night after night, money and titles had seemed the best the world could offer. But when she got access to them, she wanted something better, something by whose terms Charlie Chaplin did not have to be patronized nor she to be a liar. And when she met Fitzgerald in Hollywood, she was able to decide almost immediately that he was what she wanted. She had never known anyone like Fitzgerald—writers and literary intellectuals during her brief stay in New York had intimidated her—but her infalli-

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ble instinct must have seized on what even by the time she sat down to do this book she could only express indirectly and cumulatively: that with Fitzgerald she had come to the *very* best.

Fitzgerald educated her. He would prepare detailed reading lists for her, discuss her assignments when she had read them; they listened to music, read criticism, and they called it the F. Scott Fitzgerald College of One. If there is something embarrassing and pathetic in the way she talks about her studies ("I thought, suddenly, I will not be in this position again. They discuss Franz Kafka and T.S. Eliot and Wallenstein and Richelieu and the Thirty Years' War and I sit on the outside, looking in.") and about the reading lists themselves, there is also something new and striking in such a picture of Fitzgerald: the man who with Edmund Wilson and other friends seemed humbly to accept his role as intellectual inferior, whose spelling was a public joke, had with delight and great energy taken on the role of "intellectual conscience" to someone else. And so much of what Miss Graham presents of Fitzgerald comes at us this way. She found him all by herself. She hadn't known who he was; she hadn't read his books. For her there were no staled or hackneyed public images, no old history, coming between them. This is why she can make us *see* the things his friends and Mr. Mizener could only refer to in writing about him: his wit, his charm, his astonishing profligacy of spirit, and his self-hatred. Even his drunks, which had until this book become distant and legendary—one of them already the subject of a famous novel and play—are made real; meaner, nastier, more shocking, perhaps, than it had become necessary to think—but for the first time the real behavior of a real man. The F. Scott Fitzgerald Miss Graham found because she looked for herself and because she had the proper need of him was a strong man. He educated her; he gave her values.

The final twist about the Fitzgerald we see through Sheilah Graham's eyes is that for her he had become the exponent of the values he embodied as a creative artist—he who had seemed so helpless to come to terms with them himself.

Perhaps nobody's values have been subjected to the kind of critical scrutiny Fitzgerald's have. Virtually everything he wrote raises in the minds of his readers the question of his own relation to the moral and spiritual emptiness of the ethos he so poignantly chronicles. Does he stand inside or outside the terms by which his characters judge the world and on account of which they are doomed? It would take only a small failure of imagination, only a minute but essential shutting off of sym-

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pathy, to find Fitzgerald's life doomed as are the lives of his characters, and for something like the same reason: not because he seemed so much to dignify their illusions but because the illusions he dignified were so cheap.

Like Sheilah Graham, Fitzgerald had done a great deal of traveling to get to the Hollywood where they met. If her journey can be described as one straight up, then his was one down through the bottom and out the other side. Both of them had displayed great courage, but hers, of the nervy kind, risked only not succeeding; he had risked failure. In order to be something it was impossible for him to be—what he called "an entire man in the Goethe-Byron-Shaw tradition, with an opulent American touch"—he had handicapped himself and his thick, easy, generous talent at every turn, and in the end probably only left one book and a few stories that will outlast the radical social changes of the next few decades. The "entire man" he dreamed of was a man always to be remembered as much for what he was as for what he did, in whom it would be impossible to distinguish the boundary between personality and achievement, a "figure." But Fitzgerald was born into a world in which everyone *begins* as a figure. In St. Paul the confusion between personality and achievement, though on another level, comes easy. You do not attain it, you fall victim to it. In a place like the snowy, red-cheeked, robust, self-made world of "The Ice Palace" and "Winter Dreams" what you do is the public definition of what you are, the exclusive and exhaustive one. And the problem, if you do something so indefinable and subversive of order as write, is not to impose a public image but precisely to protect your private personality from the exactions of an image foisted on you, as it were, almost at birth. Under the circumstances, Fitzgerald did not have to become the embodiment of the Jazz Age, or anything else—without some great effort he could not have avoided it. In seeking the old unity of life and art, what he achieved was an immensely fertile but almost fatally costly confusion of experience with the meaning of experience, of identification with empathy. He became someone for whom there was neither escape from innocence nor retreat from consciousness.

That he kept the cost from being fatal, that he made his self-conscious innocence work for him, is after all only an ambiguous victory. Nevertheless, it is a victory, and one to which we owe a unique, irreplaceable record of what Americans come from and what they must all get through in order to grow up. In some ways the purest product of Fitzgerald's special gift for tossing experience at you still raw and just un-

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wrapped from the nerves is *This Side of Paradise.* Certainly the book is a chaos, an adolescent riot of literary mismatched limbs, changing voice and sexual incompetence. However, it is wild and profuse not only because Fitzgerald was then a totally undisciplined writer but also because the novel itself so perfectly achieves an identification with the disorganizing and unmanageable predicament of Amory Blaine. Amory's predicament often seems like child's-play, but Fitzgerald's keen inside sense of it, his respect for its urgency cuts through the triviality of its specific content and makes us see it for what it really is: an expression of the great American conflict between a meanness of culture and a grandeur of pretension—the struggle between the coarseness of attitude that gives Americans so much will to deal with the world and the faint, delicate image of beauty that is to be the object of that will.

This Side of Paradise lacks even the pretense of a plot, and the fact that it is not plotted derives from a conscious refusal on Fitzgerald's part to have it so. He does not know what must become of Amory and therefore cannot make what happens to him fit into some pattern of becoming. "I know myself—but that is all!" is Amory's last cry—and it is Fitzgerald's cry too. Nor does he really plot the later novels (of course, and always, excepting *Gatsby*). Anthony Patch and Dick Diver get older; their lives themselves have taken on more form, and therefore the books do. Fitzgerald is able to take these characters farther—he takes them, in fact, up to the point of dissolution. But he does not really either get beyond them in time and look back nor outside them and look in. He is never recreating life but only making a progress report on it.

With *Gatsby* something different happened. Gatsby is not a character in Fitzgerald's sense, not a life in the process of unfolding. Gatsby is an idea. In writing the book Fitzgerald was clearly seized by a vision, a pure distillation of his relation to something large and abstract—to America—and at the end of this vision there was Gatsby's corpse floating in the pool. The corpse, the abstraction, gave him the freedom he never sought or took elsewhere to direct all the movement that led to it.

Tender is the Night, then, is Fitzgerald's last progress report on his odyssey into figuredom. The report is a bad one. Dick Diver is finished, and finished in a way seemingly prophetic for Fitzgerald: he is no longer useful to those it had become the meaning of his life to serve. The year *Tender is the Night* came out Fitzgerald and Zelda published a little piece ("Auction—Model 1934") taking inventory of the acquisitions of their life together. They unpack their household goods and find themselves left with a heap of attic-bound junk, the bric-a-brac of former

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good times and enthusiasms and wastefulness. The article is written in a tone rather lyric and tender, but the inventory has the finality of a last counting. They end by saying: "We shall keep it all—the tangible remnant of the four hundred thousand we made from hard words and spent with easy ones these fifteen years. And the collection, after all, is just about as valuable now as the Polish and Peruvian bonds of our thriftier friends."

There is no human stance so attractive as the refusal to be thrifty. To the Midwestern boy Fitzgerald was for such a long time, using up with easy words what had been earned with hard ones became a point of self-respect. More than that, it must have seemed the only possibility for purging himself of the littleness, the spirit of husbandry, bred so inescapably in the struggle of his forbears to make some permanent mark on the wide, shifting middle reaches of a vast continent. Surely in his projected ideal triumvirate of the "entire man," it was the force of Byron that Fitzgerald felt most keenly. And like Byron he was to write one book out of the wisdom that comes with knowing the self has given all it had to give and that therefore it need give nothing: *The Last Tycoon* is his *Don Juan*.

If the collection of stuff that in only a few years came to be relics of an ancient and dead past was no more worthless than the Polish and Peruvian bonds of the prudent, unlike the bonds it had to be paid for twice. It was yet to present Fitzgerald with a bill in the form of a terrible crisis of spirit. Fitzgerald was to be forty years old and totally unable to write—he who had sometimes knocked out stories in a matter of hours—before his romantic conscience could decide he had paid enough and was now permitted to muster the thrift to save himself. *The Last Tycoon* and the Pat Hobby stories, written during the time with Sheilah Graham, signal his capitulation—or if you will his advance—to a new role. He was now to be that most intensely partial, un-"entire" of men, an artist.

He was ashamed of the new demands he felt obliged to make and spoke of them with heavy irony: "And if you were dying of starvation outside my window, I would go out quickly and give you the smile and the voice (if no longer the hand) and stick around till somebody raised a nickel to phone for the ambulance, that is if I thought there would be any copy in it for me. I have now at last become a writer only." To Sheilah Graham he spoke of his demands not at all. But though the best of the times they had together were often idyllic, often gay, though Fitzgerald was tender and infinitely sympathetic, what she says makes it clear that *happiness* for him then was work.

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The Last Tycoon finished might have turned out to be his best novel or his worst, but it would have been a novel different in kind from all the others. The completed chapters and notes are written by a Fitzgerald who had finally settled for the wisdom that can come this side of paradise and for the comforts of the traditional relations between a novelist and his society: the one not taking meaning from, but giving meaning to, the other.

Midge Decter

THE SERIOUSNESS OF ROBERT PENN WARREN

SELECTED ESSAYS. By Robert Penn Warren. Random House. $4.00.

Any critic who is really interesting in himself, who is worth reading as an individual writer and thinker, is likely to be so much more various and subtle in practice than he is in theory that it is important to understand why his theory is important to the critic himself. Even if he is not an aesthetician or philosopher, but simply a sensitive intelligence responding directly to works of art, his general point of view, though he may often forget it, serves as his formal code, his landmark—in actual practice, his way of defining his total experience to himself. This definition may not serve him in specific cases; the critic will often find himself in sympathy with writers he does not agree with. But his way of defining his life to himself can be so urgent as to become another presence in his work; what is important in his work is not only what he says, but what he would like to say.

This seems to me the case of Robert Penn Warren. The textbooks he has edited with Cleanth Brooks have more than any other single force helped to establish in our universities "critical" reading as a substitute for the old historical concerns; of course it was not Warren and Brooks who started this trend—they merely serviced it more effectively than others did. Yet the point here is that as a working critic Warren is not only far more elastic in his taste, shrewd in his judgment and generous in his interest than any other critic identified with the Southern "school," but that he remains all of these things without yielding in his allegiance to the same fundamental point of view that is shared by so many Southern poets and critics. This point of view I should describe as an attempt, through an ideal conception of poetry, to reclaim the Christian, sacramental vision of the world

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destroyed by scientific materialism. Although Warren, Brooks and Tate may disagree as to specific elements in poetry, it is clear enough that at least in the recent past (Tate is now a Catholic) they all believed that the poetic imagination gives us better access to supernatural knowledge than any other tool that man has developed since the rise of modern science deprived so many men of faith in such knowledge; for them poetry is not only knowledge, but it is in line with the kind of knowledge that men once claimed from religion.

Yet Warren is not only a steadier critic than Tate and an incomparably more generous and interested one than Cleanth Brooks; he is a particularly gratifying example of how utterly direct, objective and *concerned* a critic can be. There are many specific judgments one could disagree with in these ten essays. Warren attacks the idea of a "pure" poetry into which ideas do not enter. He writes about Conrad with an emphasis on stoical wisdom that overlooks the hallucinated, purely driven side of Conrad's work. He is marvelous on Faulkner and almost equally good on Hemingway, but as with Conrad, he gives too much stress to ethical themes in discussing Robert Frost—who has always been admired too complacently for this side of his work. One may admire Katherine Anne Porter without desiring to make the pedagogical inflation of her literary virtues that Warren tends to make, and in another way, one can admire Eudora Welty and yet admit about certain of her books, as Warren does not, the ineffectiveness of her charms. It is easy to agree with him on the hollowness of Thomas Wolfe and the extraordinary, self-won achievements in Melville's poetry; one can quarrel not so much with his claim that "The Ancient Mariner" is neo-Christian as with his failure to prove what, in his terms, is the artistic achievement of the poem. Yet whatever one's running response to them, the essential experience one gets from reading these essays is the close contact with a superb critical intelligence, with a mind that is deeply serious, in whom analytical power and real sensibility are constantly matched and mixed. Warren has learned the art of writing criticism from the teacher's need to point and to explain without yielding to the teacher's addiction to impersonal formula and condescending rules. Anyone who knows how unfelt the language of classroom critics can be finds himself exhilarated not only by Warren's freedom and robustness, but also—and this seems to me something that many good critics never learn—by the gift of speaking his own mind without being self-conscious. Probably only novelist-critics and poet-critics (Warren of course is both)—not critics who depend too much on criticism itself—ever attain this professional directness. Although he sometimes tends to inflate a

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particular text when he is really concerned with it only as illustration, it is even more to the point that Warren has learned from his long practice in the classroom to concentrate on the actual matter in hand in a way that emphasizes his own affection for a text rather than pride in the "method."

It is tempting to show in how many particular insights Warren has shown himself freer and more ranging than his school. Nevertheless, he does belong to a "school"—to a point of view, a doctrine, he shares with many Southerners and traditionalists. He sees the experience of modern man as one that cries out for the Christian vision of the world as sacramental, not accidental and meaningless. Warren states his own philosophy in a passage on Conrad: ". . . the last wisdom is for man to realize that though his values are illusions, the illusion is necessary, is infinitely precious. . . in the end, his only truth." He says the motif in Conrad's fiction is the "true lie"—that which we believe because we must, not because we can.

In reading Warren's fiction and poetry I often have the sense that this theme of "the true lie," of the necessary contradiction between man's nature and man's values, offers an image of stoical struggle that is necessary to Warren. He refuses the sanctions of orthodox Christianity, which proclaim spiritual values as absolute truth, and the naturalistic interpretation of values as pragmatically necessary to man. For Warren values are something that man *insists* on heroically and arbitrarily in the face of everything. There is no *system* of values that he believes in; there is only the last-ditch faith in values themselves as they emerge through the activity of literature. At the heart of literature is the essential faculty of poetic imagination, which works through symbols that are recollections of our ancient connection with a spiritual world.

What Warren does in his work is actually to make the Christian sensibility, the awareness of "order" and "truth," an extension of the literary imagination. His struggle, the special struggle that goes on in all his creative work and divides it between introspective rhetoric and the nightmare of a totally corrupt society, is a peculiar one. Warren is really concerned only with literature (one reason why he is so strong a critic), but he seems to me beset by a need to keep alive the "sacramental vision" as a tragic discrepancy. Literature thus carries the burden of reminding man of his true values. It is as if Warren associated his "sacramental vision" with the classic power of literature itself—he writes like a man who has isolated this power in literature and given it a name. My complaint against this procedure is that it makes the great imaginative novelists he discusses, Conrad and Faulkner, sound much more noble,

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deliberate and coherent than the imagination itself can ever be, and that, as in the long essay on "The Ancient Mariner" with which his book ends, it makes him seem far more interested in making out a case for the would-be Christian in Coleridge than for what in the poem is—if not "pure"—abidingly mysterious. The opposite of Warren's "sacramental" vision is not, as he suggests in the essay on Conrad, the "sceptical" vision; it is the imagination working with what cannot be *entirely* construed as ideas and meanings; it is the imagination delighting in its own power.

Alfred Kazin

THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

THE PRAGMATIC REVOLT IN AMERICAN HISTORY: CARL BECKER AND CHARLES BEARD. By Cushing Strout. Yale University Press. $3.50.

When history became a professional academic discipline in the United States, it was shaped by two major influences. The first was the great example of the science of the nineteenth century, particularly of Darwinism, which made historians feel that if history was to have any sure value and continue to win prestige it must develop methods and produce results similar to those of natural science. The second was the example of German academic history and German methods, which in their own way confirmed the demand for exactness and finality inculcated by the ideal of scientific history. Hardly any important historian was immune from the influence of this ideal, whose exponents asserted that the historian could be, and even demanded that he should be, in some sense "objective," and that his work should have the kind of detachment and conclusiveness that was believed to be present in all scientific work. In 1901 Edward Cheyney suggested in his presidential address to the American Historical Association that if we knew the laws of history, "we might reason and act with the same intelligence and precision and anticipation of success with which the engineer acts in conformity with the known laws of physics."

Around the turn of the century a revolt began against the simple dogmatism of *"wie es eigentlich gewesen."* This "pragmatic revolt," as Mr. Strout calls it, was started by Frederick Jackson Turner and the advocates of James Harvey Robinson's "New History," but was carried to its consummation chiefly by Carl Becker and Charles A. Beard. Mr.

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Strout argues that in discarding the somewhat naive ideal of scientific history, these two men "fatally undermined the historian's confidence that he can tell the historical truth about the past"; and that they "failed to make clear just what new responsibilities the historian assumes when he no longer pretends to be a scientist." They "tended to reduce the historical imagination to a mere weapon in present struggles." In trying "to prevent the naive assimilation of history by science they overdramatized the differences, and in so doing they promoted a misunderstanding of both disciplines."

Still, after Beard and Becker had done their work, no well-informed, reflective American historian could espouse the scientific ideal with the old forthright simplicity and naiveté. This Mr. Strout does not deny; he admires the intellectual courage of his subjects and he approaches their work with impeccable fairness. I share his reservations about the profundity of Beard and Becker as philosophers. I am not so familiar with the work of Becker in this area, but Beard's writings on the problem of historical knowledge have long since struck me as muddled.

Fortunately the pioneering work of criticism undertaken by Beard and Becker did not need to be done inordinately well to be inordinately useful. But the same cannot be said about the task Mr. Strout has set for himself. Since there is already a fairly large literature of counter-attack against the relativism of Beard and Becker, to be a pioneer on this front is no longer possible. Mr. Strout has written more lucidly and in a more equable temper than some of his predecessors, but I fail to see that he has been able either to add very much to previous argument or to set down a major synthesis of opposing views. His criticisms and his resolutions of the problem are offered chiefly at the level of common sense. For a working historian, this is not an unsatisfactory thing to do, but it can hardly yield a book that is more than a readable restatement of some of the issues.

Mr. Strout's position, so far as it can be condensed for the purposes of a brief review, is that "if the historian is time-locked in a prison of his own climate of opinion, he cannot give a historical account of the outside world." In this prison, the historian is in no position to discern the limitations and failures of past historians caught in their own time-locked situations. In short, Mr. Strout opens up, as other critics of relativism have done, a dizzying vista of infinitely regressive subjectivism. Earlier critics have also insisted that in order to make firm statements about the limitations of any other historian's perspective one must presumably rest upon a fundament from which some firm statements can

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actually be made. Although this argument has never seemed to me to be valid against the most sophisticated statements of relativism, it may be in fact valid against some of the versions which can be found in Beard and Becker.

A substantial portion of this book is also given over to an account of the careers of Beard and Becker as publicists, liberal idealists, and reformers, to their hopes and disillusionments in the era of two world wars, and to Beard's isolationism. While Mr. Strout makes it clear that he considers some of the positions taken by the two men inconsistent with their relativist views, he is on the whole rather vague about the precise relationship between his main concerns. It is clear that Beard and Becker became interested in historical theory partly because of their urgent concern with public issues. But it is not clear that they might not have had exactly the same public views, had they espoused objective history instead of relativism. Mr. Strout's book falls uncomfortably between its two main problems: it is neither a thorough discussion of the problem of historical knowledge nor a full account of his subjects as public men (though it sheds some new light on the latter, especially in interesting quotations from unpublished correspondence).

There is probably a moral to be derived from all this, though I am loathe to draw it at the expense of Mr. Strout, whose work shows him to be a historian of more than ordinary gifts. It would be good if every historian gave some thought to the fundamental problems of historical knowledge, but it is not by the same token good that many should feel impelled to write about History instead of writing histories. I would urge upon my fellow historians at least a brief moratorium on abstract speculation in this field, which may well be left to those philosophers who are most concerned with it. The problem of historical knowledge is neither unimportant nor uninteresting, but dealing with it effectively does require some special philosophic gifts. Mr. Strout quite rightly remarks that "the historian's ideas at the practical level of research and writing are of a different order from, and may even be better than, his ideas at the theoretical level of reflection." Beard's books of substantive history, even when the current deflation of them has run its course, will still have more enduring value and interest than his once useful but often inept efforts to popularize Croce, Mannheim, and Riezler. Becker's contribution to quickening the sense of wit and style among historians will be more valuable than his historical speculations. The same is true of the historians of the earlier era, who played with theories of "scientific history." I would rather have written any one of the nine volumes of Henry Adams's great history than all

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the speculative essays on the problem of historical knowledge that have appeared in the United States since George Bancroft first put history *en rapport* with God—including, by the way, the nonsense that Adams himself wrote on this subject.

Richard Hofstadter

POETRY CHRONICLE

THE ODYSSEY: A MODERN SEQUEL. By Nikos Kazantzakis. Translated by Kimon Friar. Simon and Schuster. $10.

THE COUNTRY OF A THOUSAND YEARS OF PEACE, and Other Poems. By James Merrill. Alfred A. Knopf. $3.95.

THE NIGHT OF THE HAMMER. By Ned O'Gorman. Harcourt, Brace. $3.75.

SELECTED POEMS, 1928-1958. By Stanley Kunitz. Little Brown and Company. $3.75.

The unusually warm reception that has been given Mr. Kimon Friar's translation of *The Odyssey* by Nikos Kazantzakis together with Kazantzakis's reputation abroad, predisposes one to expect a major poem. It is certainly an important poem; but just as indubitably, it is an eccentric one. And despite its earnest philosophical intentions—probably, indeed, because of them—it often seems more Victorian than contemporary. We are given the spiritual anguish and quest of modern man, but there are qualities in the poem that make it difficult to think of anyone more nearly contemporary than Arthur Hugh Clough. Clough, one recalls, often questioned if man's highest visions, including God, were

Nothing more, nothing less,
Than a peculiar conformation,
Constitution, and condition
Of the brain and of the belly?

Odysseus is prepared to come forward on nearly any page to corroborate Clough's worst fears:

"I know that God is earless, eyeless, and heartless too,
a brainless Demon Worm that crawls on earth and hopes
in anguish and in secret that we'll give him soul,

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for then he, too, may sprout ears, eyes, to match his growth,
but God is clay in my ten fingers, and I mold him!

* * *

For God is not a phantom formed by fear or hope
but the heart's only child, born of despair and courage."

If there has been any "progress" between these two passages it is simply in the eradication of doubt, and possibly in the infusion of a stoic bravado.

It was inevitable that *The Odyssey* should have been compared to Joyce's *Ulysses,* but the resemblance stops short at the title. There is one prose work, however, to which Kazantzakis's poem bears a remarkable resemblance—I mean Herman Melville's *Mardi.* Kazantzakis was probably unaware of the book, but a brief comparison is worth making because it illuminates the character of the poem, and helps to focus the nineteenth-century quality I am insisting on in terms of the structural allegory and the philosophical solemnity. Melville missed a great chance in not naming his hero Ulysses instead of Taji, as he could have done easily by some minor adjustments in the supporting framework. Our taste being what it is, I have no doubt that *Mardi* would then have ranked much higher in the Melville canon than it does today. Both heroes start out on related quests for spiritual self-realization. When Taji, on the last page, cries out, "Now, I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail! realm of shades!" and disappears in his shallop "over an endless sea," pursued by his Furies, the only end he can have is that heroic, stoic acceptance of the Abyss that Odysseus finally achieves while clinging to an iceberg at the South Pole in the concluding books of *The Odyssey.*

Taji is in pursuit of a mystic albino maiden who represents the ideal of perfect fulfillment, and whom he never finds. The islands he visits in his search provide commentaries on certain aspects of society and states of soul whose radical imperfection is heralded by the maiden's absence. A similar framework is devised in *The Odyssey* when Odysseus, visiting Crete, buys a statuette of a god with seven heads. These heads, beginning with the lowest, which represents brute animality, represent successively, war, lust, sensuality, intellectual aspiration, the tragic vision of life, spirituality, and finally (the seventh head, which has no features) the dissolving of the soul into nothingness. From this point on, Odysseus is frequently described, a little grotesquely, as "the seven-souled man," "the seven-headed-man," and so on, and his journey to-

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wards the South Pole becomes an exploration of these seven states until he fades into nothingness at last.

Structural similarities abound throughout the two books. Both heroes travel with a group of rather tedious, talkative friends who, certainly in Taji's case, and with qualifications in Odysseus's, are meant to reflect aspects of the character of the principal protagonist. Both discussion groups are very earnest about the nature of sensual experience, of love, of moral reality, of God, man's destiny, and so on—so earnest, in fact, that they seldom grow tired of repeating themselves. Their various dilemmas and problems are more or less illustrated in appropriate action as they move along their respective itineraries through fantastically exotic landscapes and censurable societies. The character of these problems is stated in terms that, as I have already said, sound hardly less mid-nineteenth century in Kazantzakis than in Melville. For example, he is much troubled by that old conflict between the Head and the Heart that troubled the Victorians so much. He sounds peremptorily Victorian on the high ideal of stoic duty:

> *". . . I was born in a roofless house:*
> *the more a soul mounts towards its peak, so much the more*
> *does a cruel, joyless, unbearable duty bind it."*

Not since Tennyson wrote *In Memoriam* has a poet been as explicitly concerned with the survival of the fittest. And no Victorian rationalist was ever more prone to preach than this Odysseus. When, in Book Nine, he and his friends have rifled Akhenaton's tomb of gold and jewels (this is an unusually shady Odysseus) and are happily sailing down the Nile, it occurs to him that his act has not been in accord with that terrible grandeur of soul associated with him, so he throws the loot overboard, and then addresses his companions:

> *"Brothers, you know not how much I, too, hate poverty,*
> *and yet today I suddenly felt our souls weighted down*
> *with gold, unable to walk lightly, and I thought:*
> *'Riches are good and they can buy the entire world,*
> *but best is that proud hand that flings them to the winds':*
> *and that, my lads, is why I threw my hands above the river!"*

Action is usually the prelude to a short sermon.

The problems and doubts of the Victorians legitimately continue to trouble men, but in *The Odyssey* they are staged in a way that recalls that first great age of geological discovery, Higher Biblical Criticism, and stoic morality rather too insistently. One could spend an

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amusing week of rainy evenings working out parallels between the allegorical patterns of *The Odyssey* and *Mardi,* but of course the similarity between them is of no importance except as it underscores certain limitations inherent in this kind of multiflorous allegorizing. What we have in both cases is an allegorical narrative of exotic surface in which incidents and characters are crowded into a tapestry of almost Spenserian profusion. The trouble is (whether we are speaking of *Mardi, the Faerie Queene,* or Kazantzakis) that this kind of multiplicity of "significant" detail, although it may be arranged according to a meticulously planned design, never moves towards any realized symbolic concentration of effect. Its rewards stay in the story, and it is bound to seem richer to those who prefer medieval romances than to those who prefer Dante.

The eccentric quality I have referred to is perhaps even more vividly present in the local imagery than in the narrative episodes. Here are two representative images:

. . . moon-browed Helen swaying like a swan,
her pregnant form upheld by her old nurses gently,
her holy belly swollen, a mature ant-mother
who packed unnumbered swarms within her egg filled loins.

Once more the long days rose sand-spattered on the earth,
rough scaly crocodiles slid through the tepid waters,
strong snakes coiled in spasmodic twists and flicked their tongues
while their small glittering eyes flushed sweetly like a girl's.

It is as if Baudelaire and Osa Johnson were collaborating on a revision of Tennyson's imagery. The effect is occasionally strikingly original, frequently disconcerting:

A warm wind blew, white orchids steamed
on the dark women's crinkly hair, fat widows danced
and bore about their necks their husbands' whitened skulls,
and then the bride snaked in like a wild hunted beast
to spy the land, lust-laden, painted to the gills,
her stout and buxom body smeared with gleaming grease.
An old witch doctor slunk about the growling groom
then threw upon his shaggy back a wedding robe
close-woven, scaled with yellow-gold canary wings,
and the roused bridegroom rushed through the rank sweating dark
to grab the shiny bulky flesh of his fat bride.

The imagery in the poem sometimes evokes a strange archaic world

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of ominous color; more often, as here, it merely lends support to the theatrical. The chief risk of theatricality is vulgarity, and *The Odyssey* does not always escape that danger. The thing to remember about the poetry in its English version is that it begins with Tennyson (which is a good starting point for a poem like this):

The Evening Star had vanished in the sea like flame,
and honeysuckle tangled in the hair of night,
burst, till the curled locks in the courtyard smelled of musk.

Working out from this native base, Mr. Friar has been able to give us a translation filled with many memorable passages and scenes among some less memorable ones. It was a prodigious task to have undertaken, and Mr. Friar's performance is sustained and often vivid. All the same, I wish Odysseus didn't sometimes sound like a Mississippi River flat-boatman boasting:

The man of seven souls then sang a Cretan verse:
"Hey I'm the lightning's only son, and the snow's grandson;
I cast the lightning when I wish, or I fling the snow."

Turning now to a dozen volumes of poetry that have appeared during the past two months, one is left with the sense, usual on such occasions, of a good deal of disciplined and informed craftsmanship, a good deal of integrity, and a small library of lifeless verse. But it is not the dullness that saddens one; it is rather because the verse is often so good. It's like standing over the body of Adam, beautifully sculptured in clay, and knowing that God has decided not to breathe life into the competent frame. This time, however, there is an unusual consolation, for *The Country of a Thousand Years of Peace* by Mr. James Merrill not only answers all the technical requirements of good poetry, the frame has come to life.

It is always a little difficult to discover the subject of a poet who is not content with writing set pieces, whose poems are genuine explorations and testings of experience. His subject is not his titles, and it is what he ends with, not where he begins. To crudely formulate for a moment, Mr. Merrill's subject is essentially metaphysical: it is concerned with the divisiveness of the world, and the recognition, painfully arrived at, of a state of soul, a condition of human separateness, that results from it.

As this would not seem to be the ostensible subject of any one poem here, one must work one's way towards it slowly, and the logical

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place to begin is with the imagery. The most recurrent image in Mr. Merrill's poetry is the mirror, and closely related to this central symbol are images of glass panes, images of dreams that reflect hidden thoughts, of art that reflects reality, or sometimes distorts it, and the camera lens that reflects appearances. At a farther remove, but still related, "voices from the other world" reflect voices of the living, and images of the maze suggest the bewildering, winding way that lies among so many spheres. In a universe of reflections the first question must always be, "Where is the locus of reality?" The first act should be to reach towards it. But the effort is difficult; for reflections are always reflections *in* something that stands as a barrier between the observer and the shadows it projects beyond itself. It is for this reason that panes of glass and mirrors are not only reflectors in Mr. Merrill's poems, but cold walls that turn one back from vision, in which alone communication in love with others is possible. Returned into himself, the person withers in loneliness, rejected by a universe of mirrors that only holds him from reality. This meaning is stated most forthrightly and simply in one of the most beautiful poems in the volume, "The Octopus." Vision, "asleep in the eye's tight translucence," is sometimes

> *coaxed out by lusters*
> *Extraordinary, like the octopus*
> *From the gloom of its tank half-swimming half-drifting*
> *Toward anything fair, a handkerchief*
> *Or child's face dreaming near the glass. . . .*

Vision with its arms reaches out "in holiness of indirection"

> *Till on glass rigid with its own seizure*
> *At length the sucking jewels freeze.*

To live in a universe of reflections is not to know where reality is, and it is to distrust one's own. This impasse is brilliantly stated in "Some Negatives: X. at the Chateau:"

> *Where skies are thunderous, by a cypress walk*
> *Copied in snow, I have you: or*
> *Sitting beside the water-jet that here*
> *Is jet. You could be an Ethiop with hair*
> *Powdered white as chalk*
>
> *Instead of simple diffidence on her tour*
> *Of monuments. Yet these first*
> *Images of images I shall keep.*

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* * *

Here where no image sinks to truth
And the black sun kindles planets in noon air

The lover leads a form eclipsed, opaque
Past a smoked-glass parterre
Towards the first ghostliness he guessed in her.
He bends her to a dazzling lake . . .
If the lens winks, it winds them who knows where.

What is really true where images and reflections rest in each other like Chinese boxes? Leaning over the fountain's side, staring at the reflections, the poet says that "no image sinks to truth," a line that, by its oblique reference to a photographic negative sinking down in the developing pan, radically questions all appearances. The peaceful landscaped garden, the quiet, possibly dull girl sitting there, are reversed in the negative into a scene and a Negress of exotic wildness. It is possibly in this dark tumultuous world, image of the poet's subconscious, that reality is to be found. But isolated in this private world, how is love, which is a coming together of two persons, released? The last stanza is a metaphoric descent into this underworld, a descent from appearances in search of some reality. But it seems, in this poem, an almost despairing search. The loved object has already become a ghost, "a form eclipsed," for the lover, incommunicado in himself, cannot sustain a sense of her otherness. But if the sought reality is found, the last two lines hint of the possibility of a return to the world of light and life.

The total effect of the book, however, is not at all one of descent and exclusion. "The Lovers," for example, is based on an image as striking as any Donne ever used to suggest the merging identities of lovers, and in the total poem it moves towards a firmly modelled resolution:

They met in loving like the hands of one
Who having worked six days with creature and plant
Washes his hands before the evening meal.
Reflected in a basin out of doors
The golden sky receives his hands beneath
Its coldly wishing surface, washing them

Of all perhaps but what of one another
Each with its five perceptions holds.

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The poet who is confronted by multiple worlds, whose deepest perception is of the divisiveness that cleaves the hearts and minds of men, who is tortured by the question of identity and otherness, is already a metaphysical poet. The subject that is deeply at the heart of James Merrill's poetry is his search for integrated experience in a world of unrelated appearances. This fragmentation can be resisted, overcome, only by breaking through the prison of self, only in the discovery of others in love, only by pursuing the vision beyond the glass barrier. The intellectual activity generated in the process of metaphorically exploring this fragmented world—that is, of discovering his subject—and disciplining it with fine technical mastery, is the vital spark by which these poems live. And they have as much life as any poems being written today by an American of Mr. Merrill's generation: possibly more.

For Kazantzakis, Odysseus was a *subject* in the deepest sense—a focus of inward urgencies; but I am not quite sure what Mr. Ned O'Gorman's Odysseus (poem 33 in *The Night of the Hammer*) is supposed to be, though my ignorance stems from no lack of words on Mr. O'Gorman's part:

> *The only thing that moves in the whole storybook*
> *of Eyeless is the cape of his bright-spoken,*
> *hot, limping, daisy-sworded, lyre-waisted,*
> *violent, seadeepblue, unaphrodisiac, caterwauling,*
> *cradle-legged, death-bedraggled, life-green*
> *littlebabysoldier, Giant, who struck everything*
> *he passed into a village crowd to burn forever*
> *in the copper pane of his shield.*

It was this kind of word-drunkenness that led Mencken to announce years ago that the Americans were equalling the best efforts of the Elizabethans. Mencken of course was reprehensible; Mr. O'Gorman is merely misguided on an important point. Mr. O'Gorman has faith in words. He believes that by rubbing two of them together, fire will result. So do I—under the proper conditions; but in Mr. O'Gorman's case faith in words sometimes slips into superstitious credulity. "An Occurrence in an Acre" is an example of what I mean. It describes how details in nature can sometimes coalesce into vision (the "To see a world in a grain of sand" sort of thing). Mr. O'Gorman picks up an interesting rock from a stream bed:

> *There was a great hush*
> *in my arm. I held the closet of emeralds;*

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sea horses galloped to coral.
I fell in the tilt of the sea.
O copy-book of elves; I'd touched entelechy.

The first four lines are very respectable. But Mr. O'Gorman is expecting too much of that word "entelechy." Not even the elves can lend it the magic he asks of it. This isn't being metaphysical, but it is sounding like a philosophy major. The trouble is that Mr. O'Gorman's poetry is also *outside* poetry, and no real control is exercised over the vagaries of his images from below. On the other hand, the promising thing about his poems is that the images often exhibit an admirable sense of the virtues of surface, and a vigor great enough to suggest that they may at last hack and hew their way towards a significant internality.

There is a piety (which has been encouraged by some of Mr. Eliot's remarks) that the only reputable critics of poetry are the active practitioners of the art. For those subscribing to this rather exotic tenet, Mr. Stanley Kunitz's *Selected Poems, 1928-1958,* must seem the windfall of the season. More than a half dozen of America's most respected poets engage in a dust jacket contest to see who can show the most deference to his poetic achievement. Mr. Richard Wilbur is probably the winner: "One of the best poetry manuscripts of the century. No exaggeration. . . ." Borrowing his terms of appraisal from some modern critics of Ben Jonson's poetry, Mr. Henry Rago says that Mr. Kunitz's language shows "an extraordinary combination of toughness and polish; a classical strength." It is easy to see why Mr. Rago, consciously or not, has resorted to this vocabulary here. There is a verbal self-consciousness, an educated archaic ingenuity with words, a trick of emphasis and sinewy syllabics, in many of these poems obviously deriving from Jacobean and Carolinian models. Here are two stanzas (the best two) from "Beyond Reason":

I do not come intent to be your lord,
Nor to contract the empire of your flight,
But as the long eye holds the spinning bird
Enclosed in the circumference of sight

And yet the bird is infinitely free
To dip its beak into the thinnest air,
So do I stand. I am not destiny
To color time or plot a hemisphere.

The taut neatness of the conceit, its terse, emphatic development in

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bright, rather thrilling logic, the air of judicious deportment combined with inner life, remind one a little of, say, Marvell's "Definition of Love." But this tautness is unusual, and more frequently the echoes are merely imitative without the success represented by these two stanzas.

Naturally Mr. Kunitz is not attempting simple imitation of an earlier mode in the manner of a Beddoes. Nevertheless, certain questions are raised. We sometimes like to imagine similarities between ourselves and the seventeenth century, but it is doubtful if this borrowed inflection from the past is quite as relevant to our sensibility as we pretend. To foster this imitative quality in words is to give them the wrong kind of attention. The experience in many of these poems seems rooted in ingenious but shallow verbalism; only occasionally do the words well up from a deeper level. The result is an imperfect union that can produce a tedious obscurity—the experience remote and unfocused, the words showy but artificial. "As Flowers Are" is a fairly representative poem. The poet tells his lover, as they sit in a summer landscape, that she has brought fulfillment to him: a highly conventional theme and situation. Yet repeated readings of the poem leave the exact shade of meaning Mr. Kunitz wishes to communicate curiously vague. This is because he is not as interested in what he is talking about as in how he is saying it, and when a gap occurs between meaning and expression, the poem is lost. I quote here only the opening verse:

As flowers have wars that the philosophic eye
Stoops to behold, broils of the golden age
When honey dropped from the trees, and the bees perform
Their educated dance, we find our skins
In which to parable the act of love,
Contending, as at first, that the world might move.

The verbal texture appears deceptively tight, almost bursting with meaning. But the pickings end up by being a little meagre. Unless there is some esoteric reference of which I am not aware, the flowers' wars are virtually meaningless. "The philosophic eye" seems to be mainly a space filler, but even so, it requires some elucidation that is not forthcoming. Presumably it belongs to a natural scientist who is interested in this botanical warfare (whatever it is; the last three verses clarify nothing), but why he should be stooping to observe what could surely be better viewed panoramically by a survey of the whole battling field or flower garden is not clear. The golden age is no doubt introduced because the poem is about happy love, but it looks a little uncomfortable among all this vegetal bloodshed. The educated dance of the

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bees hardly seems to fit gracefully into its syntactical context, nor am I quite sure why the dance is "educated." We have lately been told that bees do indeed have a language, and can give each other exact directions about the locations of rewarding flower beds by executing delightful little dances. But is Mr. Kunitz following Donne's use of the new science to this extent? Nor am I at all sure of the meaning of the last line. Is the procreation of generations figured here, or is it merely a highbrow variation on Gilbert's charming line, "It's Love that makes the world go round!"?

These difficulties and uncertainties are compounded through the remaining three verses. Everything looks elliptical and subtle, but I think close examination will show that a good many of the "intellectual" images are faithful old stand-bys tortured out of familiar countenance by the ruthlessness with which, as Mr. Theodore Roethke has put it, Mr. Kunitz "can wrest meanings from bleak and difficult materials." The trouble is that he sometimes doesn't. After perhaps twenty careful readings of this poem I still do not quite know what happened in the summer landscape with the poet and his love; but more crucially, I think Mr. Kunitz is in some doubt himself.

The enthusiasm which has greeted this volume, and which decorates its dust jacket, has left me free to stress its defects. But the book contains some very fine poems, though they all belong to a different category from these of which I have been speaking, which compose the majority. The good poems have a clarity and immediacy that come directly from experience—experience sharply defined and nourished by words, not obfuscated by verbalism. There are a half dozen or so such poems in the book, but "The Dragonfly" is so superior to them all that it is the only one I shall cite here. In this poem Mr. Kunitz has used language so naturally that not until later readings are we aware that he has also used it with greater art than anywhere else. A revelation of the contradictions and complexity of death opens from the agony of a dragonfly devoured by ants which the poet observes on a path. The poem is a beautiful achievement, and it reminds one again (as so many other poems of recent years have) of the purity and efficacy with which animals (and insects) can focus in poetry the fundamental problems of existence after humanity itself has grown almost too corrupt to do so. I have no space here either to quote or discuss this poem, but I hope it represents the direction of Mr. Kunitz's future work.

Marius Bewley

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TOM BROWN IN QUOD

BORSTAL BOY. By Brendan Behan. Knopf. $4.50.

In 1939, Brendan Behan, aged sixteen, was sent to England by the I. R. A. on a mission of terrorist bombing. Behan had been involved in the Irish Republican movement from the moment of his birth: his father had been captured during the Civil War, "and when I was six weeks old my mother brought me up to the jail and held me up, on the road outside, for him to see. . . ." After 1922, the title I. R. A. was limited to that intransigeantly nationalistic wing of the revolutionary army which had refused to accept either the Treaty or Partition; it was declared illegal in Eire, the jails filled up with its members, and they were excommunicated. Behan grew up within this movement; its history was his, its cause his cause. As a small boy he had belonged to the Fianna, or Irish Republican Boy Scouts, and when he was thirteen years old he began training in the I. R. A. The bombing campaign in the service of which he had been sent on his first and only mission was intended to force the English to free the six Northern Counties. Other bombings, in which innocent people were killed, had already been brought off in England; I. R. A. men were being captured, tried, and sentenced to death.

Less than forty-eight hours after he arrived in Liverpool, even before he had time to unpack his "Sinn Fein conjuror's outfit" (his bombing kit), young Behan was picked up by the police. He expected to be beaten, tortured, perhaps even hanged, and with the resoluteness of a youthful fanatic was prepared to become a martyr for "Holy Ireland." His mind was swarming with superstitions about the English: when he heard some Anglican prisoners singing a hymn to the tune of *Deutschland Uber Alles* he was puzzled until he recalled that "the British Royal Family were all Germans and spoke German in their own palaces." It was also overflowing with those names and events, so singular and exotic, yet so passionately clung to, with which anyone who has known Irishmen for very long soon becomes familiar: Roger Casement, the "Republican saint"; "Bloody Sunday, when the Black and Tans attacked a football crowd in our street; the massacre at Cork; Balbriggan; Amritsar; the R. A. F. raids on Indian villages"; "St. Stanislaus Kostka, the boy Prince of Poland"; "Dr. Gallagher [driven] mad with torture when the Fenians were doing their solitary confinement in Tom Clarke's time." At any time of the day or night young Behan was likely to break into a tirade beginning, "A synod of Irish Bishops held at Drumceatt

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in 1172 decided that any Irishmen that refused to acknowledge the King of England as his ruler was excommunicated," recapitulating in inexhaustible detail the protracted history of injustice and persecution that the Irish suffered at the hands of the British, and always locating the center of horror in the distant past. "Didn't they condemn the men of 'forty-eight and tell the people to give up their crops and die of the hunger in the ditches at home, with the grass-juice running green from the dead mouth of a mother clutching a live infant. . .!" The profuse, effortless flow of rhetoric cannot for long conceal the hollowness, inflation and remoteness of what was being communicated. At sixteen, Behan was a stripling version of "the citizen" in the Cyclops episode of *Ulysses* — strident, inbred, obsessed, ignorant. Yet *Borstal Boy,* Behan's autobiography of his adolescent years, is about the un-making of a fanatic, and is in the classical tradition of the education of a young man.

That education begins when Behan is remanded to prison to await trial, and it is an education in paradox and toward an awareness of irony. After he makes a speech defying the authorities of the prison, he is taken back to his cell and beaten — slapped in the face and punched in the body. He expected this and even a bit worse; but he did not expect that two minutes after the jailers had left, in would come the prison librarian to lend him some books, one of which was *Under the Greenwood Tree.* The jail itself was a typical Victorian bastille, with no toilets or running water in the cells; but Behan was able to have the *Daily Herald* delivered to him every day to read "while I leant over my dinner." There was brutality to spare in the prison; but he discovered that the prisoners themselves were capable of much worse than the guards. The antediluvian rules of the prison made conversation almost impossible; but there were apparently an unlimited number of Victorian novels to read. And when he was finally sent to a Borstal (a boys' reformatory), Behan was given the first pair of pajamas he had in his life.

Bit by bit, as he went on reading and observing, and as he got to know the other boys in the young prisoners' section of the prison, his allegiances began to shift.

> I was a bit ashamed in a way that I was worried over going to p.s. [penal servitude] for fourteen years or to Borstal for three and ashamed, too, because it was not really the length of the sentence that worried me—for I had always believed that if a fellow went into the I.R.A. at all he should be prepared to throw the handle after the hatchet, die dog or shite the license—but that I'd sooner be with Charlie and Ginger and Browny in Borstal than with my own comrades and countrymen any place else. It seemed a bit disloyal to me, that I should prefer to be with boys from English cities than with my own countrymen. . . .

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What it must have taken in disinterested awareness and self-esteem for such an Irishman to be able to feel this, let alone admit it in writing, is difficult to calculate or even perhaps to believe, but the authenticity of these sentiments is confirmed in a very funny and ingeniously executed scene in which Behan, trying to read *Cranford*, is interrupted by the patriotic bellowings of another Irish prisoner down the hall. It is the night before two I.R.A. men are to be executed in Birmingham, and the patriot exhorts Behan to shout along with him. Behan is finally shamed into murmuring "Up the Republic" through a ventilator, and then hurries back to the pages of Mrs. Gaskell, to her damson-tarts and cherry brandy—*Cranford* has become more actual to him than the Republic. For Behan had slowly begun to discover that he was still a boy, not a man, a realization marvelously expressed by the changes of clothing the young prisoners are compelled to undergo. When he was arrested Behan was wearing a suit and the traditional I.R.A. trench-coat; most of his friends in Borstal were similarly dressed or wore military uniforms (many of the under-age criminals had come from the various services). As soon as the young prisoners were taken to jail or Borstal they were given new uniforms—the principal item of which was a pair of shorts—which they wore until they were discharged. The young toughs responded to this costume with sardonic ambivalence: it was an obvious humiliation to be got up like "Boy Scouts"—and yet which one of them did not, in some part of him, want to be treated like a boy, to be permitted that partial release from responsibility, that special consideration which boys have always been given, and, it is clear, which none of them ever had. Their changing from trousers to shorts was another part of the paradoxical and perversely ingenious mixture of brutality with civilized decency that Behan encountered in the English jail, and is a symbol of the conflicts so near the heart of his experience and so much the substance of his book: treated as a boy he finally becomes a man.

It is when Behan finally reaches the Borstal (one of the "open" ones, in which inmates are treated with considerable leniency) that this experience is fully realized and that the book takes on its characteristic form. As Behan recounts it, the Borstal is really a kind of lower-class public school, and *Borstal Boy* is directly in the line of *Tom Brown's School Days* and *Stalky & Co.* The boys combine in half-affectionate conspiracy against their officers—the equivalent of masters, although Borstals do have "house-masters"—who are not their enemies, as they were in jail, but their acknowledged superiors, doddering and stuffy of course, but their superiors nonetheless. The most riotous scene takes place

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during a compulsory church hour in Holy Week, as an Italian priest leads the boys around the chapel.

The working-class and criminal argot that Behan renders with superb authority is, in its picturesqueness, coarseness and sentimentality, almost a precise equivalent of the school-boys' secret language. The cliques, rivalries, and comradeships of the boys, at work and in the dormitories, are also represented in a pleasantly familiar and traditional fashion, though Behan's handling of homosexual love among young men whose existence has been institutionalized is, I believe, unprecedented in its forthrightness, gentleness and delicacy of tone. The Borstal boys all know that their institution is modelled on the English school, and their emulation of the upper-class original is humorous and unabashed. Indeed, one of the inmates, an old Harrovian, prefers the Borstal to his old school: " 'E says the grub's better.' " The Governor of the Borstal is alternately called "The Squire" and "The Old Man" and is a dead ringer for "The Head" of *Stalky & Co.* And the place even has its heroic myth of origination.

Behan's response to all this—especially when it became clear that he, no common criminal but a political enemy of England, was going to be treated no differently from any other boy—is gradual but unmistakable. He slowly forsakes most of his political convictions; he begins to see Englishmen as distinct from that monstrous bogey of his childhood, the British Empire; and finally, after a disillusioning experience with a priest, he loses his religion, his last prop of dogmatic certitude, though retaining for it the same candid and sentimental loyalty that he does for Ireland itself. The climax of his education, which amounts to something like a conversion, is his learning to play Rugby—a game which he had, out of both national and class feelings, spent half his youth sneering at—and loving it and becoming expert at it. And when the Borstal team plays against a college from outside and he discovers that the college boys don't play as fairly as they do, it comes as a final revelation to him; having once tasted the unforgettable superiority of such an experience he is willing, at least for the moment, to forgive almost anyone anything. Shortly after this event he is released from the Borstal, put on a ship and sent back to Ireland.

There is something so inherently unlikely about this story that even after one has finished it and felt its consistent rightness one is inclined to doubt. This doubt would be justified if Behan were not of a special breed. No ordinary bully-boy, punk-delinquent, I.R.A. irregular or other, is likely in our time to respond to this time-worn English regimen with the openness and stamina that he did. Behan has subsequently spent

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more time in jail, and it is common to hear him compared to Jean Genet. On the evidence of *Borstal Boy* it seems to me that this comparison is largely mistaken. Behan does not conceive of his having been either an I.R.A. member or Borstal inmate as a revolt against society; he has no *mystique* about crime and no theory about the unique moral status of criminal society. Above all, he seems to have virtually no impulse to construe his experience as essentially symbolic of modern life, or assert that his individual fate comprehends a judgment of civilization.

He does not, I would suggest, because in a quite real sense he was not raised in the twentieth century. He comes from a working-class family—as a youth he was apprenticed to the house-painting trade—but one which was both musically and literarily accomplished. His most memorable boyhood adventures were to deliver milk to Joyce's sister and to pass by the homes of Yeats, O'Casey and Sheridan on his way to school. "My mother worked in Maud Gonne's house on St. Stephen's Green and my uncle was in the I.R.B. with Yeats, and many is the winter's evening I spent after tea, telling . . . stories I'd heard from my father and mother and uncles about Yeats, Stephens and his lovely red-haired wife, and Maud Gonne, and A.E." But even this, atypical as it may be, does not sufficiently account for the striking absence of modern feelings—of exacerbation, inversion, alienation and self-denigration—from Behan's writing. On the other hand, his involvement with Irish nationalist culture, begun at so precocious an age, does, I think, come closer to the matter of his experience. To begin with, Ireland itself, depressed and debilitated, isolated and self-isolating, has remained curiously inaccessible to many of those events and movements that characterize our age; and the passions and beliefs of so many Irishmen, including Behan, are bound up either in an obsession with England in its historic role as an oppressor or in some extreme commitment to Ireland's quasi-mythical past. To be sure, this condition of separation from the central movement of the European mind did not prevent some Irishmen from being among the greatest writers of our era, writers indeed who defined its very character; but the case of Behan indicates that it may work in another way too. At the age of sixteen Behan was not only possessed by an eccentric nationalist mythology-*cum*-history, by attitudes that had only the most marginal relation to the general European life, but the very tissue of his sensibility seems to have been composed of the language, the phrases and accents of a long-lost time—and it is just here, I think, that a large measure of his paradoxical vitality is to be found.

In prison, Behan whiles away the time singing songs to himself:

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In boyhood's bloom and manhood's pride,
Foredoomed by alien laws,
Some on the scaffold proudly died,
For Holy Ireland's cause;
And brothers say, Shall we, today,
Unmoved by cowards stand,
While traitors shame and foes defame,
The Felons of our Land. . . .

Anyone who has ever read Ebenezer Elliott's *Corn-Law Rhymes* or some of the Chartist hymns will recognize this kind of verse. Its pathos and force arise out of a connection with the nineteenth century and its tradition of working-class life, and with the language that still informed that life, but no longer does ,or can. Behan also sings songs which are connected with the Irish "literary" folk tradition, and also have a relation to the language of *Marmion,* of "The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna," and of "The Private of the Buffs." It is a language that was generally debased and lost to literature; but such a language, if it is taken seriously by a boy or young man, can become a kind of armor against modern life and may even be turned into an instrument for dealing with it. So it seems to have been for Behan. In the degree that his mind was penetrated with the fantasies in these heroic rhymes and accents (and he knows hundreds of such songs and poems), in that degree was he able to humanize his experience, to deal with the Englishmen about him, even the prison officials, as something more than the tools of imperialist, ideological tyranny, in time to discard ideology itself.

Nor is this a connection with the past that deforms Behan's sensitivity to the present. On the contrary, his intense aliveness to speech is his largest resource as a writer, and *Borstal Boy* is without question one of the most impressive and convincing renderings of the language of the British lower-classes—and therefore of their life and culture—ever written. Behan is truly on the inside of this society; he registers every inflection of class and regional dialect and discerns the shades of feeling each accent conveys. The conversations in dormitories and lavatories that he records express, as nothing else I have recently read by an English writer does, the life of the depressed classes and the wretchedness of it. A close analogy to what Behan has achieved in this regard are those remarkable scenes in James Jones's *From Here to Eternity,* in which the entire range of aspirations, desires and disappointments of American working-class boys in the 'thirties were poignantly revealed. Behan is more fortunate, and more of a piece, than Jones, however, for the energy and intelligence of the language in those

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scenes informs the rest of his prose, as it never does in Jones.

As it so often happens, this extraordinary virtue also contains Behan's signal weakness and the principal threat to his talent. His gift of language is so lavish and fluent that it allows him to buy things too easily, to remain too close to the surfaces of experience. One finally feels that he has not allowed his experience to impose upon or violate his style; nothing in the book resists his rhetoric, makes it stumble, or forces it into a realization that it *is* but rhetoric. Because Behan's style seems to take him wherever he wants to go, he has never had to stop and grope about in those regions of existence where all language is inadequate. What I am suggesting is that he uses his language as an evasion; somehow one feels that there ought to be more disturbance, more exasperation and resentment, more uncertainty and awareness of insoluble contradiction than get expressed here. In fact, Behan uses style in the way that less gifted people use ideologies—to deny those depths of misery, perversity and confusion without access to which no style can ever transcend itself. *Borstal Boy* is that kind of triumph of articulateness which intimates a failure of inwardness.

In short, Behan comes out of it all smelling too much like a rose. Like Dylan Thomas, to whom he has also been compared, Behan is a man enchanted by the sound of his own voice, and the image of himself that he offers at the end of the book is of a sweet, wise, decent and disinterested tough customer. In our time the image of an innocence which has managed to preserve itself is almost irresistibly attractive, and no one knows this better than Behan himself. Yet if he is to go on as a writer, he will, like his great countryman, have someday to lie down "In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart." Here he has not, and as a result, *Borstal Boy,* for all its brilliance, is a work of guileful innocence. It is, I should say, an excellent book to give to a very young man.

Steven Marcus

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